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WITH A SILKEN THREAD

AND OTHER STORIES

BY E. LYNN LINTON

AUTHOR OF

"PATRICIA KEMBALL," "THE ATONEMENT OF LEAM DUNDAS,"
"THE WORLD WELL LOST," "UNDER WHICH LORD?" ETC.

IN THREE VOLUMES

VOL. I.

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TO

MY DEAR FRIENDS OF LANG SYNE,

MR. AND MRS. HENRY WILLS.

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ENGLISH

I DESIRE to thank the Editors of *All the Year Round*, *London Society*, *The Illustrated London News*, *The Queen*, *The World*, etc., for their courteous permission to publish in a collected form some of my stories which have from time to time appeared in their papers and magazines. In the story "For Love," which first appeared in *The Queen* newspaper, lies the original idea of my novel "The World Well Lost."

E. LYNN LINTON.

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WITH A SILKEN THREAD.

WITH A SILKEN THREAD.

CHAPTER I.

GIVING ROPE.

Doubtless the story of King Cophetua reads well. The picture of the Royal lover condescending to the maid of low estate—lifting beggary to a seat on the Imperial throne and covering rags with the Royal purple—thrills the hearts of all those who prize love more than conventional laws and who hold that social distinctions should be subordinated to human emotion. But the thing works awkwardly in real life. When King Cophetua's choice drops her h's and marries plural nouns to singular verbs her grammatical slips count as so many flaws in the crystal of her purity, and every uncouth phrase chips so much off the marble of her moral worth; a malicious world looks askance, hiding its laughter in its sleeve, and prim old dowagers, whose main occupation in life is to preach down a daughter's heart that her hand may close on money,

point to the defective syntax of the lowly born as to the kind of thing which a romantic fancy idealizes, and to the peccant prodigal himself as one whose example is a warning to both sexes—showing emphatically the way to be avoided, not followed.

We have no sympathy nowadays with virtue in the rough. Of what good a woman's sincerity, devotion, unselfishness, when she eats with her knife, drinks with her mouth full, says "We was a-going to" and "Was you a-laying on the grass"? Sincerity, devotion and unselfishness are not confined to her or her class, we say, pleading the cause of humanity at large when it suits us; and many a lady might have been found who would have been as noble in her conduct as she and would have understood syntax and manners better. Bad grammar has not the fee-simple of all the virtues; and education scores honours by itself.

This was the philosophy which was to be brought home to Bernard Haynes, when his mother, apparently yielding to his passionate prayer, agreed to receive at Midwood, as one of themselves and his prospective wife, pretty Lois Lancaster, the daughter of a Wythburn guide living at the foot of the Helvellyn, and necessarily not well up in the accidence of refined living. Bernard had fallen madly in love with Lois this last summer down in the lake country, whither he had gone to read for the Long—or to imagine that he

was reading; fallen in love in all honour and youthful sincerity of purpose be it understood—designing to be a modern King Cophetua in a minor degree, and to make the peasant-born girl his wife when he had entered actively on the administration of his estate. It was his ideal of life just then; for the mission to which he this year specially believed himself consecrated was the fusion of classes and the establishment of universal fraternity. Mrs. Haynes, clever in her generation, understood to perfection the art of giving rope. She knew the generic impracticability of youth and the headstrong nature of her son Bernard in particular, given as he was to temporary theories by which the world was to be regenerated and all the wrongs of society set to rights; but she trusted to early influences, to the sensitive perceptions of education, to the glaring discrepancies of caste, to the contrast which would be presented to his lover by his sisters, and above all to the grace and beauty of Edith Grattan—the only daughter of Lady Julia and Mr. Grattan, of High Heath; and she believed that, with all these silken fibres laid among the strands, her rope would be found effectual, and that by concession she would conquer. Wherefore, after the due amount of reluctance and remonstrance, she took her resolution as one who yielded; invited Lois Lancaster to come and stay at Midwood; and kept her own counsel for the remainder.

"You always were the best mother in the world!" cried Bernard enthusiastically, when she had dropped her guard and lowered her foil. "I should be a brute if I did not love you beyond all things."

"And show your love by your obedience?" she asked with a smile partly weary, partly satirical. To a respectable Philistine as she was, these excursions into the lofty regions of ideal ethics were fatiguing and contemptible; and Bernard's frequent "crazes," now for communism, now for patriarchal simplicity—at one time for benevolent despotism and the return of the Can-ing man, and now again as at this moment for the general uplifting of beggars' daughters by modern King Cophetuas—seemed to her almost as melancholy a state of things as if he had been a declared lunatic in Hanwell, pronounced unfit to manage his own concerns at Midwood.

"In all but this one thing—only this one! And when you have seen Lois you will understand and forgive," he pleaded.

"I understand and forgive now," she answered. "That does not however, include sanction; even though I have put my own feelings aside to meet your wishes."

"I am content to wait till you have seen her," he repeated.

She passed her hand caressingly over his smooth, young, earnest face.

"Ah! my boy!" she sighed; "if your poor father had lived you would have been in better hands than mine. He would have been a successful guide where I have failed. I have always been too indulgent, and have trusted too much to love and too little to authority. I see my mistake now when it is too late."

"Don't say that, mother!" cried Bernard, really pained. "You know how much I love you—how deeply I respect you! Don't cast a doubt on my love and devotion for you!"

"No, dear, not so long as you have your own way and are not thwarted. But see, in the first serious conflict between us, who has to yield! Ah, Bernard! words are easier than deeds."

"No, no, mother, only in this one thing. And am I not in this what every man is?"

"Man!" she half whispered, smiling. "My boy Bernard, scarcely twenty-one, a man!"

"And then, you have not seen Lois yet," he said again, ignoring her maternal disclaimer and going back to the central point of his position, the very core and meaning of his love—the girl's beauty—which was indeed supreme.

"Well, my boy, we will say no more now. I have consented to her coming here, at your request; but you can hardly expect me to think that the daughter

of a mountain guide is the right kind of person for your future wife--you, our Bernard, to whom we had looked, your sisters and I, as the head of the house who would take his dear father's place and keep the family name where it stood in his lifetime! It is a bitter disappointment and humiliation, as you must see for yourself; and you cannot expect us to do more than tolerate it. The influence too, that it will certainly have on your sisters' marriages——"

"No, not to men worthy of the name of men—men, not barbers' blocks—men, not coxcombs!" interrupted Bernard, full of the righteous thoroughness of iconoclastic youth.

Mrs. Haynes smiled again.

"Men of our position are gentlemen, my dear boy," she said quietly; "and gentlemen have what you would perhaps call the prejudices, but I the obligations, the refinements, of their order. Such a man as Sir James Aitken, for instance, or young Charley Grattan, would not like his wife's sister-in-law to be a peasant-girl out of Wythburn."

"She is equal to either Maud or Cora!" cried Bernard hastily.

Mrs. Haynes laid her hand on his arm.

"Hush!" she said authoritatively; "your sisters are sacred!"

"So is Lois, mother," he cried in hot defence.

She lifted her head proudly and looked at him straight between the eyes.

"But your sisters are ladies," she said with emphasis. "Now let the discussion drop. I have given way, as you desired, and the thing is at an end for the present."

Seeing nothing of his mother's secret thoughts and unconscious of the rope which was being paid out so liberally, Bernard's only feeling at her acquiescence to receive Lois Lancaster as her guest, on an equality with herself and his sisters, was naturally one of the very excess of loving gratitude. His mother, he said, was one in a thousand; she only needed to be tried to prove her surpassing excellence. What a heart she had! That a proud woman, as she confessedly was, should have so far sanctioned such a choice as this which he had made, showed how deep was her real human worth and how innocently shallow her conventionalism when brought face to face with the higher and holier things of life. He declaimed for a good half-hour to his favourite sister, Cora, on the sweetness of his mother and the delightfulness of Lois; on the moral harmony and spiritual worth of the arrangement altogether; and how he expected everything from it—how his sisters, and especially his dear little Cora, would give his Lois that "tone" which she had not perhaps in such perfection as might be, and which, when acquired, would put the finishing touch to her loveli-

ness; while they would get good from her simpler nature and unspoilt manners, her directness and absolute innocence.

To all of which Cora assented openly, with secret reservations unexpressed; wondering what Bernard could possibly mean by saying that Maud and she would "get good" by their association with a peasant-girl; but—sighing—supposing it was because he was in love! Being in love made every one so stupid! There were Maud and Sir James Aitken, they were stupid enough, and she was sure they were in love with each other; though Sir James had not said so yet and Maud only showed her state of mind to eyes as quick to read the hidden things of a heart as a sister's. And now Bernard was talking nonsense about a guide's daughter from the foot of Helvellyn doing them good —them!—Maud and herself—ladies, with a landed proprietor for their dead father and a living bishop for their uncle!

But as she had the pliant hypocrisy which belongs to a peaceful and loving nature, she said nothing. She merely smiled very sweetly and looked as if she agreed; and Bernard kissed her with a curious air of patronage, and thought what a dear little thing she was, and how well Lois and she would get on, and what a lucky fellow he was altogether.

If Bernard was charmed with his mother's acqui-

escence, the girls were dismayed—Cora quite as much so as Maud, though she hid it better. Maud indeed openly and passionately resented the arrangement. She thought she should never be able to meet Sir James Aitken's grave eyes, which could be so scornful on occasions, when he should be introduced to Lois Lancaster as Bernard's future wife and her own sister-in-law. She was almost as keen as mamma herself in her estimate of social harmonies, and felt that the offer, for which she had waited so long and patiently, would be farther off now than ever—in fact, so far off as never to be made—when once the degradation of the family was published abroad. She wondered at her mother for sanctioning this mad infatuation of Bernard's; but he had always been her favourite, she said to Cora, with angry tears in her dark blue eyes; and they, Cora and she, had been sacrificed to him from the first. It was very wrong of mamma—very. Of course, neither Sir James Aitken nor Edith Grattan—and if not Edith, then not Charley—would come to the house now. How could they, with such a person as Lois Lancaster to meet them?

And when she said this, angry tears came into Cora's softer eyes to match her sister's, as she sighed by way of echo: "I wonder at mamma, too! It is very wrong of her to forget us, as she does, for Bernard!"

When however, they carried their griefs to their

mother, hoping that remonstrance would make her change her mind before she was committed to action, she put them aside—not harshly, but with the iron hand which they knew of old to lie hidden beneath her velvet glove.

"Do not talk nonsense, my dears!" she said calmly. "I know what I am about."

"It is degrading to little Cora and me!" flashed Maud, taking the attitude of her sister's protector—as indeed she was, being the eldest of the family and six years older than Cora, who was only seventeen.

"What I can endure, you can also," returned Mrs. Haynes. "And I do not think I have ever shown myself indifferent to your best interests."

"Not unless Bernard came in between," said Maud, who quaked so soon as she had spoken; for Mrs. Haynes was not meek towards rebellion.

Her mother looked at her sternly. She was a woman with a rather set face of the classic type, with a fixed mouth, and a pair of fine dark eyes that did a great deal of work for her.

"I have never sacrificed you to your brother," she said slowly. "You are unjust, Maud, and ungrateful to say so."

"You are sacrificing us now," sobbed Maud.

"Go!—you are a silly girl; you understand nothing," returned her mother, with a fine dash of contempt in her

voice and manner. "Leave me to manage my own affairs, and when I want your advice, I will ask you for it. Till then oblige me by not giving it."

"It is too bad," fired Maud as her parting shot, subsiding into furtive tears and her modern point; Cora, her eyes swimming too, seating herself close to her disgraced sister, but looking with pleading love at mamma, thus keeping on terms with both, as her manner was. She was called the "peacemaker" in the family, and sometimes "the dove;" and her *raison d'être* was to be a kind of elastic cushion, softening the shocks all round by never taking part with any one and always making the best of everything.

Presently the hall bell rang and two young men entered the room. The one was Sir James Aitken, the owner of Aitken Park and the desired of all the unmarried girls for miles round; the other Charley Grattan, who, when his father should be gathered to his fathers, would be the possessor of High Heath, one of the best properties in the neighbourhood.

It was on these two young men that Mrs. Haynes had fixed her eyes as husbands for her daughters; including, with Charley, his beautiful sister Edith as the wife manifestly designed by fate and fitness for Bernard. Character, position, age, circumstances, everything harmonized in this triple arrangement; and she felt sure that she had only to play her cards skilfully to

make the three tricks she had counted on in her hand. This absurd affair of Bernard's had therefore been a subject of much anxiety to her. She had pondered on it night and day ever since he had broken the ice and confided it to her, as a dutiful son should; looked at it all round and in every light; foreseen all its dangers; mapped out the obstacles; weighed all the chances; and had at last, as we have seen, come to the conclusion that giving rope was the best way of strangling the incubus, and that Bernard must prove for himself how fatal was the mistake he wished to make, no one attempting to counsel or coerce. It was a bold game, taking into consideration all the collateral circumstances at stake—Sir James and Charley Grattan, and the indignation which Edith might naturally be supposed to feel at having had a girl of Lois Lancaster's degree as her antecedent rival. But Mrs. Haynes was clever, as has been said. She knew that large games include great hazards, and that when one is in deadly peril the way of escape cannot possibly be easy. Hence she decided on her course, and now had only to watch, and guide as well as she could if things threatened to go wrong and needed a skilful touch to put them right.

They were two handsome young men who came in now to make one of their frequent calls on the Midwood ladies. Sir James was the older, graver, darker of the

two. He had had a long minority and a not too happy boyhood, for his father and mother had died while he was still an infant, and he had not been over-well treated by his guardians. They had cared for his money and what they could make out of him, not for his best advantage and what they could do for him. Hence, he had developed a certain sadness, which was natural, and, what was also quite as natural, a certain suspicion of motives which seemed to have robbed his youth of half its charm because of all its spontaneity.

He was in love with Maud Haynes, yet he doubted her. He was diffident of himself; he had a title and an estate; and he was steeped to the lips in distrust of women. It was then only too easy to him to be wary and cautious, timid and unconvinced, feeling as he did that no girl could love him for himself while his advantages hung like millstones round his neck. Thus it was that, although he loved Maud Haynes, he had not yet declared himself, uncertain as he was if it were himself or his name and possessions which would be the bait to which she would rise—if she rose at all. For Maud was both proud and shy, and concealed her feelings with the skill of a veteran; so that she gave him no kind of intimation as to what she thought or what she desired. And her physique aided her in her reticence. She had great eyes habitually cast down and veiled by long lashes, and that pale cream-coloured

skin which emotion only renders paler. Hence, she never blushed; and Sir James was undirected by stock finger-posts. So the affair between them had dragged on for some months now, the one yearning, the other hesitating, but the final plunge not made and never seeming nearer.

Meanwhile Mrs. Haynes looked on, and considered within herself—should she bring matters to an issue suddenly or leave them to the gradual development of time?—which was very slow and wearisome. She saw that Sir James was blind and Maud perforce was dumb; but as there was no rival, near or far off, she decided on leaving the young people to themselves; and now she thought it best that nothing had yet been said, with this ridiculous affair of Bernard's in the wind. Sensitive and suspicious as he was, Sir James might have been estranged for ever had he thought that his name and fortune had been taken to bolster up the name and fortunes of a partially disgraced family. No, it was best that nothing had been said—that nothing should be said—until this craze of Bernard's had got itself settled.

As for Charles Grattan, that could wait almost indefinitely. He was but two and twenty, Cora only seventeen; and they were destined. No one who saw them together could fail to see the sequel. The fair, laughing, light-hearted youth was the exact match for

the fair, genial, affectionate girl. They were not engaged any more than Maud and Sir James were engaged; for Charley had promised his mother to wait until Cora had had a season in London. She was so pretty that Lady Julia, a woman also wise in her generation, wanted to test the quality of her mind and heart and to see for herself whether the girl counted constancy among her virtues. But they were safe, thought Mrs. Haynes. If only Maud and Bernard were as safe she would sound her maternal *Nunc Dimittis* with a light heart on the chord of matrimony!

Presently Bernard came into the room. He was in radiant spirits and looked more than ever the young poet, blessed and ecstatic, which was always more or less his expression. His long, brown wavy hair was flung back from his smooth face and pure white forehead; his large, grey limpid eyes were dark and tender with joy and love; he seemed as if he had seen an angel by the way—as if, like the Lady who tended the garden, his "dreams were less slumber than Paradise," and the things of his soul were more realities than the things of his daily life. Mrs. Haynes looked at him with an expression made up of pride and sorrow. If he could be got safely over these next few years, she thought—appraising poor Bernard's idealisms as if they were measles or smallpox—he might wear right in time; but these next few years were the tests. And

that dreadful girl in the background! If it had been Edith, now — calm, sensible Edith — how glad the mother's heart would have been!

"What a time it is since we have seen you!" said Charley, on whom a three-days' absence, if it had not in any way saddened him while it lasted, seemed interminable now when he thought of it.

"Yes; what have you been doing?" was the sympathetic answer of handsome Mrs. Haynes.

"I don't know exactly. Edith was bitten with a mania for fishing, and I have been up the river with her every day."

"Oh!" said Cora in a tone of disappointment. She liked fishing and wondered why they had not asked her to join them, seeing that Edith and she were such friends.

"Why did you not come too, Miss Cora?" asked Charley.

She looked at him with a certain reproach in her sweet face, but quite frankly and innocently.

"Because you did not ask me," she answered. "How could I go when I knew nothing about it?"

Whereat Charley laughed and she laughed too. She always laughed when he did, being one of those natures which simply echo and reflect the moods of others and are nothing of themselves; hence are bright or dull, according to their company. With Charley Grattan

she was bright, but Sir James Aitken made her dull; while Bernard thought her as idealistic and unpractical as himself.

"It is long too since I have seen you," said Sir James, seating himself by Mrs. Haynes.

"Yes; so it is. And what have you been doing? Fishing, like young Mr. Grattan?" she answered.

"No; I do not know what I have been doing," he said. "Dreaming a little and growling a good deal."

As he said this he looked across the room to Maud.

"Ah! that is a bad habit," said Mrs. Haynes in her maternal, tranquil way. "Nothing deserves the expenditure of strength needed for growling. 'Break or bear'—that is my motto; and I find it a good guide."

"Sometimes one growls at what one can neither break nor bear," he returned. "There may be such a state as uncertainty."

"That can easily be ended," said Mrs. Haynes. "I dislike uncertainty too much to suffer it for long, and would soon know my fate if I had any doubt of it."

"True; but it is difficult," he answered.

"Life is a succession of difficulties," was her reply, with a glance at Bernard; "but they have to be conquered at all costs."

"Ah! you are so brave, Mrs. Haynes! You have such clear views and are so firm!" he said with a certain dash of envy running through his admiration.

"It is just because I have clear views that I am firm," she answered with a smile. "It is a necessity of my nature to see my way plain before me, and to walk straight to my point."

Perhaps this was a euphemism. All persons would not have called the life-walk of the handsome widow straight; and especially would not Bernard, her dear boy and hope, could he have read between the lines at this moment and seen the real meaning of her gracious bearing.

"Is this the same?" asked Sir James abruptly, getting up and going over to the ottoman where Maud was sitting, putting dainty stitches at intervals into a breadth of modern point.

"Yes," said Maud quietly, her manner still, composed, indifferent, betraying nothing of her heart or feeling.

"You don't tire of it?" he asked with a slight accent of surprise.

"Oh no!" she said; "I like it."

"How wonderful to like the same thing for so long! Why, how long have you been about this? I know it by this," he said, pointing to a wrong stitch made at some distance, and which he himself had put in one day as a kind of test whether she cared more for him than for the symmetry of her work, and so would either let it remain or take it out.

"I began it in the spring," she answered.

"And not tired yet?" he repeated.

"Certainly not. I am not so silly as to want a new interest every day," was her reply, made quietly as to manner, but secretly with both excitement and meaning.

He looked at her keenly, but he saw nothing in her calm face and well-bred impassivity of manner. If she were angling for him, he thought, she was angling in the daintiest way in which woman ever held the line for a human life: so daintily that she almost deserved her reward. And yet, if it were not angling but truth? As he thought this his sad face almost beamed and his grave eyes lightened suddenly—if she did really love him for himself?

"I am glad you are constant and not easily tired of an interest," he said in a low voice; and Maud, not to show how suddenly she trembled, laid her work in her lap and answered, as of course: "I thought every one knew I was not fickle."

"Such a nuisance, this folly of Bernard's," thought Mrs. Haynes, watching them covertly. "Just as things are getting on so well! So inconsiderate of him! so wrong! My poor girls to be perhaps sacrificed to the crazy whim of a wilful, foolish boy!"

Which unspoken reflection was a curious commentary on Maud's fiery accusation that she and Cora had been

always sacrificed to Bernard, and that mamma cared nothing for them in comparison with him. It was only another of the many instances abounding which prove that the truth is the one undiscoverable element of human life, and that what things are and what they seem to be can never be made to agree.

CHAPTER II.

HER ORDEAL.

MEANWHILE the cause of all this domestic difficulty at Midwood, distracted between love and fear, excitement and apprehension, pleased vanity and humiliating self-distrust, was preparing for her ordeal. A visit to the lady-mother of the fine gentleman who had offered to make her his wife and raise her to a place almost as far beyond her own, in the modern estimate of things, as was that mythical King Cophetua's beyond his beggar-girl's, was a trial which naturally appalled the daughter of the Wythburn guide.

Not that Lois Lancaster was a peasant-girl of the conventional type. Her father, who knew what he was about, had determined that she should be "made a lady of;" and a lady accordingly she was—that is, she had never milked a cow in her life, could not churn nor make a cheese nor cut out a shirt nor knit nor cook like a Christian; but she could tat and crochet and embroider with creditable dexterity, if her plain-work was no more commendable than her baking. She was a country girl of the modern school—rather

delicate in health, with a tendency to hysterics and no digestion to speak of; who could play a little on the piano and sing prettily in the choir; who dressed by the fashion-papers; took in her weekly instalment of penny literature; wore an elaborate chignon and a great many beads (chiefly of wood and glass) and would as soon have thought of swearing as of talking "broad Cumberland." She called the vernacular of the dales-folk "rough talk"—rough pronounced with a slight leaning towards "roof"—and her grammar was really not very much more imperfect than the grammar of most girls, though some of her phrases and epithets were local. She had caught up current slang too, and had been heard to say "awfully jolly" all the same as if she had been the real lady she assumed to be. In a word, she was the half-bred of the summer show-place; neither gentlewoman nor peasant; having lost the racy colour and untrained simplicity of the latter without gaining the grace and refinement of the former. But she was a good girl in both mind and conduct; and if not thorough in polish, was at the least substantial in propriety. And she was beautiful—wonderfully beautiful; slightly impassive perhaps, and too much like a wooden Madonna; but every feature was perfect and her colour was as lovely as her form.

Her pure, transparent skin, through which the blue veins could be seen so clearly traced, was at all times

as delicate as the lining of a sea-shell; but when the colour mounted, as it did under slight emotion, few things in nature could be compared to it for exquisite tenderness of tint. And, as she knew the value of her complexion, she took care of it and did not suffer herself to get freckled, sunburnt or coarsened. Her hair was as fine as silk and of the colour of dark amber; her eyes were large, light blue, and heavily fringed with dark lashes; and her eyebrows, of that long and lovely arch which is so beautiful but not intellectual, were the same colour as her lashes. She was tall and slight;—altogether, a supremely lovely person, who, had she been born in the purple, would have attained an almost fabulous reputation, like Helen, Cleopatra, or poor Scottish Mary. As it was, her father, who had eyes and a decided faculty for arithmetic, determined that her beauty should be made to pay somehow, as a valuable investment placed to his credit by nature.

This father of hers, old Timothy Lancaster, was one of those clever, anchorless men of whom every village possesses at the least one. "He could do anything he had a mind to," was the phrase usually applied to him by his friends and neighbours; but the worst of it was he had a mind for so little. He disliked hard work almost as much as he disliked routine; and found loafing about the glens and mountains the pleasantest thing

he knew when he was not king of his company at the beershops. He was a self-taught geologist, botanist and naturalist; but the profession whereby he made his bread was that of mountain guide. He was ambitious, and liked the society of the gentry with whom he was brought in contact during the summer; and as he was "slape" and sharp, he made a very pretty penny in consequence. Part of these pennies he had put into a good substantial stone cottage, which he had built at Wythburn and had had the wit to make picturesque; hence valuable as lodgings to the tourists who cared to stay at the foot of Helvellyn and whom he piloted up and down during the season. But he liked housing the "young gentlemen from college" best; for he had secret hopes of Lois and the soft moments that overtake men in the twilight among the mountains. In spite of his natural artistry and good-fellowship, he was a shrewd man of business who knew how to make all things pay—a fern or a flower or a bit of lead-ore from a mine; so why should he not hold his daughter's youth and beauty as possessions to be disposed of advantageously like the rest? To do him justice he kept her strict, and had no squanderings in the market-place; and, to do her justice, his task of overlooking was not heavy, for she was no gad-about nor flirt.

She understood, young as she was, that her name had to be kept as carefully as her complexion; hence she was

more chary of herself than her neighbours liked. They called her proud and stuck-up; but she let them talk. When she had won then she would have the right to laugh. Meanwhile their ill-nature did her no harm. It broke up no schemes, but if anything worked to her good in that it proved her caution. She sometimes regretted a little that bad things were said of her to John Musgrave, the young farmer who lived on the fell over there by Dunmail Raise; but she could not help it. If John thought ill of her, she used to say to herself, because she kept herself to herself, and was not a fly-by-night like the rest of the girls, it was a pity; but she could not help his foolishness and he must think as he had a mind. If he chose he could find out for himself that she was neither proud nor stuck-up; only, being without a mother and with a house mostly full of young gentlemen in the summer, she was tied to be careful, else she would give folks leave to talk in a worse way than they did now. All of which showed a certain wisdom as well as rectitude in Lois that was not without value in the formation of her character.

This year it seemed as if old Tim Lancaster's wishes were near fulfilment. Bernard Haynes had taken lodgings in his house; had spent a great deal of money in specimens for which he had neither use nor liking; had seen Lois; and, being in one of his idyllic moods, had dreamt of the possibility of transplanting so sweet a

cottage-flower into the trim parterres and costly "houses" of Midwood. He was a youth of moods. He had begun his thinking life as an ascetic worshipper of Sir Galahad and the Arthurian legends; then he developed into benevolent despotism, the King the best man—the Can-ing man, as he used to say—ruling his subjects with strength and wisdom combined; and from this he had branched off into his present craze—a belief in the universal brotherhood of the future, to be brought about mainly by Lois Lancaster as the mistress of Midwood.

Fascinated by her beauty, he believed her more really refined than she was. Down in that remote district, without the companionship of ladies of his own class, her manners, which truly were excellent for one of her degree, seemed to him better than they were, or than they would have seemed had he been able to compare her, say, with his sisters or Edith Grattan. Even when he caught this little failing, that small lapse, he did not allow it to affect the main point of his admiration. To him Lois was like some classic nymph, and far superior to the conventionalized ladies of his own time and land. She merely needed a little, very little, polish to make her absolutely perfect; when it would be seen that she was of infinitely better material than were those who should polish her. In short, he was in love; and as foolish as men in love for the most part are; but he

played old Timothy Lancaster's game to perfection, and the soft moment in the twilight came.

Being young, he made an offer of his hand as well as of his love; for he was an honourable fellow and intended to do well to every one. He would inaugurate his system of universal brotherhood and equality at Midwood, and the world would take the lesson to heart and repeat it for the advancement of society generally. If only Lois would be his wife, the human race would be benefited to the end of time, and the reign of falsehood and humbug and pretence, and a thousand other bad things, would be shortened and contracted by so much. All this was natural enough to a youth in the idyllic stage, when he has consorted closely for two months with a lovely girl in a lonely place—a girl who dressed neatly, acted discreetly and spoke with propriety; who had golden hair, sweet tender eyes and a seraphic face; who was gentle in her ways, low-voiced and sparse of speech and neither gross nor affected in mind or action. It was natural that he should dream and idealize, and forget all that stood between them when the spell had had time to work and the world, that seemed forgetting, had been forgotten. Cophetua was a King, and the beggar's daughter was his Queen; so why should not Lois Lancaster, the daughter of the local guide and geologist, be his, Bernard Haynes's, wife?

The father's delight was boundless when Bernard, carrying out the thing properly all through, told him what he had done and how that Lois had consented to be his wife; but when the news got abroad that Lois was promised to a young gentleman from London—for all high life is from London in the dales—and that she would be most as grand as the Queen herself, John Musgrave was startled as if by a shock out of *his* dream, and, as Lois herself translated it, was "not best pleased with himself or any one else."

He went over to Brigend to wish her good-bye the day before she was to leave; and he went with a curious mixture of sorrow and anger making havoc in his usually quiet breast.

"So you are going on a visit, Miss Lancaster, I hear?" he began; for he too was of the new school, and not as frankly familiar to Lois as his father had been to her mother. She was "Miss Lancaster," not "Lois," nor "lass," as the old way would have had it. As he was "Mr. John" to her, not plain "John," as his father had been to her mother.

"Yes, Mr. John," said Lois, raising her lovely eyes; "to Mr. Haynes's mother; that was the young gentleman as we had here all summer."

"So I heard," said John, twirling his hat by the brim between his fingers. "It'll be a fine uplift for you, Miss Lancaster."

"I don't know about an uplift, Mr. John," answered Lois with a certain assumption of haughtiness that had its grave side if also its comical. If she had to be Bernard's wife she must hold herself his equal, she thought. The rôle of the beggar-girl was not to her mind, though she was pleased enough with her King Cophetua. "The finest lady in the land is nothing but a lady," she continued; "and folks can be ladies as hasn't great names."

"Yes, I know that well enough," said John. "And I know that you're a lady yourself, Miss Lancaster. Still the quality is of different stuff to us dalesmen and statesmen; and by all accounts this Mr. Haynes's people are real quality."

"And father's as good as any of them," said Lois. "Father knows a deal more than most of the young gentlemen themselves know; and that they say when they leave."

"Still," said John, who had the dogged persistency of his kind, "if your father is a clever man in his way, which there's no denying, he's not one of the quality."

Lois was silent. She thought John Musgrave uncommonly disagreeable to-day, and wondered at the sudden change that had come over him. Before this summer she had thought him well enough, and maybe a little beyond. He was a fine-looking, clear-skinned, bright-eyed young fellow who bore a good name and

was not given to drink, and who, with his freehold of seventy acres, had the girls' eyes on him far and near, and was accounted a prize equal in his own way to Sir James Aitken and young Charley Grattan in theirs. And though, if Lois had been asked, she would have scorned the insinuation as an insult and would have denied that she had ever thought of him twice or wanted him once, yet she had often looked at him at church when they met in the choir; and if Fellfoot was a dull place in winter it was not so dull as it would have been had any but John Musgrave held it.

"I suppose, then," said John, "you'll not be for staying here long, Miss Lancaster, when you come back again? I've heard a tale as points that way."

Lois blushed that faint fair flush of hers which was so infinitely becoming.

"I don't know about that, Mr. John," she said. "Nothing's settled yet anyhow."

"But it is to be?"

His rasping voice was very sad, his ruddy face a little pale, his smooth brow furrowed, his full, fleshy lips contracted.

Lois hung her head and twisted her neck-ribbon whence dangled the locket which Bernard had given her. Many feelings perplexed and disturbed her at this moment; pride in her prospective grandeur and present importance; a dislike, she could not under-

stand why, to confess her engagement to John Musgrave how glad soever she might be to tell it to others —fear of the future either way, should it be realized or should it be broken off;—a very tumult of contending thoughts and feelings, each fighting for supremacy in her mind, made her bashful, sorry, moved, silent.

Then she faltered, shyly: "I suppose so, Mr. John;" and did not look at him.

"I am sorry for it, Miss Lancaster," said John bluntly. "You'd be best with your own people and your own kind. I reckon naught of these weddings out of a body's home and calling, as one might say. Best bide with one's own!"

He spoke with feeling, therefore with a broader accent and less precision than usual; and Lois was quick to note the difference.

"That might have been all very well fifty years ago, but it doesn't do now, Mr. John," she answered, taking heart of grace to speak in self-defence. "The world has pushed on a bit since our grandfathers' times, and we must go with it."

"They knew a thing or two afore," said John with more sense than elegance; "and if we take hold of some new good, we needn't leave loose of all the old."

"Dear me, Mr. John!" cried Lois with a forced smile; "one would think I was going to New Zealand,

never to come back no more; and I'm only going into Warwickshire, and shall be home again quite soon."

"Yes, home again; but how?" said John.

Again she blushed.

"That has nothing to do with my going away now," she said. "That was to be, whether or no."

John Musgrave sighed.

"I don't like it," he said after a pause, with a fine assumption of fraternal feeling as if thinking only for Lois and in nowise for himself.

Lois looked at him. Her calm eyes brightened with a certain something; it was not wholly malice and it was not all regret, but it was a curious mixture of the two. Deep down in the innermost recesses of her heart was a certain consciousness that she had been tacitly false to John Musgrave. How much soever she would have disclaimed the accusation, she knew that when she had first come home from her Penrith boarding-school she had thought Mr. Musgrave a young man of very fair attractions, and had more than once pictured Fellfoot as her future home. To be sure, she would have preferred some gentleman in the commercial line to a fellside farmer, and a town life to a country one. She would have liked a neat little six or eight roomed suburban villa, with a green door and a brass-handled bell, venetian blinds, and a nice little plot of ground in the front where she might have

grown marigolds and mignonette; and she would have enjoyed town housekeeping, where everything is at your hand and you need not trouble with laying in stores and forethought for every detail. Her one girl would have done the rough work, while she would have put her hand to the finer parts, dusting the "drawing-room," and the like; but John Musgrave was too fine a fellow in himself to be lightly regarded; and though she was fit for something better than to be a farmer's wife, as she often said to herself when she looked in her glass, still she might go farther and fare worse; and he had a good bit of land and was cleanly-living, sober and handsome.

But when Bernard Haynes came to lodge at Brigend and made himself the Strephon to her Chloe, then John Musgrave faded away like a dissolving view; and to be the wife of a real gentleman who talked so well that she did not fully understand him was a prospect too dazzling to be foregone. For all that, she had this certain uneasy consciousness, and more than once wished that John Musgrave had not come to bid her good-bye; though it did gratify her to show him the prize which she had won and to make him feel the worth of that which he had lost. Had he not been so cautious and deliberate, according to his race and kind, the thing might have been settled long ago; and then she would have been caught and caged. What a good

thing that he had been so backward! She knew that she would have accepted him had he offered, and what a miss she would have had! But for all this knowledge and self-confession, had she been asked she would have averred warmly that, of all the gentlemen of her acquaintance, John Musgrave was the last at whom she would have looked, even over her shoulder.

"Well, I must be toddling," said John, rising with a heavy sigh and limp look. "Good-bye, Miss Lancaster. I suppose you'll be writing home, so that we may have word of you?"

"Yes, of course I shall be writing to father," said Lois.

"And take care of yourself," he added earnestly.

"Thank you, Mr. John; I hope so," she answered.

"And let us hear how you get on," he repeated.

"Yes, Mr. John," she said.

"Good-bye, Miss Lancaster."

"Good-bye, Mr. John."

"I'm main sorry, Miss Lancaster. Eh! but I is," said the poor fellow with tears in his eyes. "I don't like it anyhow. It isn't the thing for you, and I'm afraid you'll find that out when it's too late to change."

"It ain't too late now," said Lois, stirred more than she cared to acknowledge to herself.

He lifted his eyes with a sudden flash. She lowered hers and was sorry she had been so indiscreet.

"Do you mean to say——?" he began, drawing near to her and taking her hand in his.

How rough and brown and toil-hardened his was! How white and fine Bernard's had been! She drew her own away.

"I meant nothing," she said coldly. "Good-bye, Mr. John. Please excuse me, I am throng just now."

"He has no one to blame but himself," was her unspoken thought, as she went upstairs into her room and turned over the dresses that had just come in from Keswick, in preparation for her intended visit to Midwood—with Mr. Bernard's mother and sisters, those formidable critics and judges in the background, waiting for her arrival before delivering their verdict; and, turning them over, she said half aloud: "I am sure they are as nice as nice; no one need be finer."

Mrs. Haynes was not one to make war with rose water. By no means naturally cruel, she was yet one of those resolute women to whom cruelty comes easy when it has to fulfil the purpose in view. Accepting her son's infatuation as a disease, she had no more scruple in using sharp measures for his cure than has the surgeon scruples in applying the knife when only the knife can herald healing. Her object was to show Lois to Bernard in a humiliating light, and thus convince him by demonstration of the unfitness which he would not receive as a doctrine preached by another.

Wherefore, to the bewilderment of Maud and Cora, and to Bernard's dissatisfaction for the one part and gratitude for the other, she asked a few friends to dinner on the very evening of the girl's arrival. She had no wish to let her get somewhat accustomed to her new surroundings before she was introduced to Bernard's world. She should be shown with the full flush of her native awkwardness upon her; with the fatigue of travel and the excitement of the first meeting to add to her discomfort and make her still more nervous and ungainly. This too was part of the rope she was paying out with such consummate skill, and in the coils of which both Bernard and Lois were to be caught and their untimely love-affair strangled out of existence.

An hour before dinner—that is, at seven o'clock—the carriage sent by Mrs. Haynes to the station drove up to the door of Midwood, bringing Lois, escorted by Bernard, to her ordeal.

"Mother, Miss Lancaster," said the boy, his face flushed and radiant as he brought into the stately drawing-room, where his mother and sisters sat, the fair-haired, weary Lois Lancaster, looking more impassive than ever because she was scared, and scarcely knowing, as she told her father afterwards, her right hand from her left.

Mrs. Haynes rose with her most courtly manner and made a few steps forward. Perfectly well bred and

graceful, she put on her grandest air and received the fluttered country girl with the magnificent politeness with which she would have received a duchess. No fault could possibly be found with her method of reception. How better could she show her respect for her son's choice than by treating Lois, peasant as she was, as though she had been an earl's daughter? Nevertheless, it was inhuman, if magnificent; and Bernard felt that he would gladly have exchanged this respectful politeness for one dash of maternal warmth, of womanly consideration.

"I hope you are not tired, Miss Lancaster?" said Mrs. Haynes with exquisite courtesy, but frigid as an icicle. "It is a fatiguing journey from Windermere to our place."

"Thank you, Mrs. Haynes; I am not overdone," said Lois, whose unmistakable accent, so slight at Wythburn, was frightfully distinct now. But she spoke with self-possession though stiffly.

"My daughters—Miss Haynes; my youngest daughter," said Mrs. Haynes regally.

The girls came forward and shook hands with Bernard's choice. They scanned her critically after the manner of girls with each other, and a glance of intelligence passed from Maud to Cora and back again. They saw before them a creature whose every feature was simply perfect; a creature with the materials of

beauty fit to set the world aflame; yet one who somehow missed the soul of all beauty—power to charm. She was bad style; and they denied the material seeing the imperfection of the result.

That bad style moreover, was a thing so subtle that it could scarcely be explained. The girl was dressed as it would seem by the description unexceptionably; and yet the sum total was failure. Her grey merino was made with the profusion of flounces and trimmings dear to second-rate fashion, and trimmed largely with mock lace of a common kind and pattern. Round her neck she wore a blue tie—Bernard's locket slung on to a long streamer of blue ribbon of a lighter shade than her tie—and a row of white satin-stone beads with a cross depending. Her golden hair was dressed in multitudinous puffs and braids—a wonderful structure, through which were visible unsightly tracts of greenish-coloured frizettes, rather destructive of the effect sought to be produced; her hat was an audacious but very picturesque Rubens, with a long white feather, a red rose, a mother-of-pearl buckle, and a skeletonized kind of aigrette as the artistic ornaments among the black lace and velvet with which it was trimmed; and her gloves were dark green, single buttoned.

Maud, in her simple dress of cream-coloured "workhouse sheeting" over her brown silk skirt, and Cora, in her sailor serge, looked what they were—ladies whose

ladyhood no dress could have diminished or advanced; while Lois, lovely as a dream, lovely as Raffaelle's fairest Madonna, stood confessed a pretence—a homely Dorking spangled to represent a silver pheasant, fondly thinking herself disguised to the life and undistinguishable from her hosts.

"I hope you are not tired, Miss Lancaster," repeated Maud, as a younger echo of her mother.

"No, thank you, Miss Haynes," said Lois.

Cora asked kindly: "Are you cold?" and Lois answered quietly: "No, thank you, Miss Haynes. I don't feel the cold, thank you."

"Perhaps you would like to go to your room and dress for dinner. We dine at eight," then said Mrs. Haynes, still with her grand air of stately courtesy. "My daughters' maid shall assist you to unpack. You have not brought a maid with you, I think?"

"Thank you, Mrs. Haynes; but there's no occasion," said Lois. "I can undo my things very well by myself, thank you."

"You had better let Sherwood assist you," said Mrs. Haynes with dignity.

"You are very kind, I'm sure; but there's no occasion, thank you, Mrs. Haynes," answered Lois, as she had answered before.

She shrank from the idea of a grand creature like a lady's maid handling her treasures and spying into

vacant spaces; and, with the suspicion of her class, she dreaded lest picking fingers should accompany prying eyes.

Mrs. Haynes bent her head stiffly; and Bernard, who had the lover's quickness of perception, saw that the first hitch had come.

"Take my mother's advice, Miss Lancaster. She knows best," he said hastily.

But Lois answered as before: "No, thank you, Mr. Bernard, there's no occasion. I can do for myself, and I don't require help."

And again the critical eyes looked at each other, and said mutely: "What a Goth!"

Even Bernard was conscious of a certain want. He would have been hard put to it to define it; but he knew that something was amiss. Nevertheless, when Lois left the room he cried enthusiastically: "Is she not lovely, mother?"

Mrs. Haynes answered quietly: "Yes, exceedingly beautiful."

"I was sure you would think so," said Bernard.

"But though she is so beautiful, she shows too much of her upper gums when she smiles, and her hands are underbred," said Mrs. Haynes in just the same voice and manner as that in which she had assented to the proposition of her exceeding beauty.

"No—capable," cried Bernard, loyal to his idyll.

Mrs. Haynes smiled.

"Capable, if you like that word best, my dear," she said. "At all events, the capability which makes the palms thick and the tips of the fingers coarse. Very honourable, I allow, for her station, but not hands generally seen at the table of one of us."

"Innocence and love and modesty are more important things than the useless white hands of ladies," said Bernard, flinging back his hair.

"Just so, my boy. I agree with you entirely," returned his mother. "All the same, I have a prejudice in favour of ladies, as I think I told you before; and I deny that innocence, love and modesty are confined to peasants. My dears," to her daughters, "the dressing-bell has rung. Are you not going?"

"You will be kind to poor Lois, mother!" cried Bernard pleadingly.

"I shall treat her as I would treat any other lady," his mother answered, holding her head high. "You desire no other mode, do you, Bernard?"

"No, dear mother. You are awfully good, as it is, I know," he said; "but," boyishly, "be kind to her, poor darling!"

"What a child you are!" said Mrs. Haynes, scorn mingled with her affection, as she swept from the room; leaving her son a vague crowd of shadowy yet all the same uncomfortable thoughts, for his share of the day's transactions.

CHAPTER III.

SHIBBOLETH.

Dressed for dinner in her high black silk, also made after the patterns of the third-rate fashion-books and greatly trimmed with blue bows and white mock lace —her lovely face, impassive and unchanging, surmounted by that elaborate structure of amber-coloured hair silken as to texture but hideous as to arrangement —Lois presented that same odd combination of beauty which did not charm and apparent correctness that was in fact bad style, which Mrs. Haynes and the girls had caught as her characteristic from the first. Neither rough nor awkward, she yet was totally devoid of grace; moving as if she were tightly braced in stays so stiff that she could not bend from the waist, and with a certain air of constrained discomfort about her that suggested unusedness to both her dress and her surroundings. But if constrained she was pale and quiet, and so far Mrs. Haynes respected her. Had she been flushed and fussy she would have been actively unpleasant; as it was, she was simply passive and gave no trouble to repress.

As each guest arrived there was the same look and movement of surprise, which betrayed the sense of her unfitness as clearly as Mrs. Haynes for her own part felt it. This young unknown Madonna, sitting bolt upright on the sofa, dressed like and yet unlike themselves and neither a lady nor a servant, neither a gentlewoman nor a peasant, with a face that would have been perfect in its fitting frame of simple rusticity or æsthetic refinement, but that now was all out of harmony and drawing, made quite an excitement among the women as well as the men.

"Who is she?" they asked curiously; Mrs. Haynes answering calmly: "A young person from the remote north, whom a strange chance has thrown on my hands for a few days. It is an odd story, but I cannot go into it now."

And when she had said this to every one alike, in precisely the same tone and with the same accent and expression, the dinner was announced, and Lois Lancaster went down with the rest.

Seated between Bernard and Sir James Aitken—Bernard having on his other hand Edith Grattan—the country-bred girl was dimly conscious of perils and perplexities before her; and the guests, who noted her, were as conscious that she was a misfit among them, and did not know how to pronounce her shibboleth as it should be said. For one thing, she did not know the

use of the fish-knife, but, to be quite fine and correct, chased her piece of cod about the plate with a fork and a bit of bread, and hunted up the slippery morsels with amazing perseverance. For another, she cut her quenelle as if it had been beefsteak, and when offered wine asked for beer; she ate her jelly with a spoon and fork, and the ice-pudding was evidently experimental; but when the cheese came round she took two bits with the look of an old friend long parted and now happily met again, and carried it on the point of her knife without fear or faltering. At the dessert too she had no fears, but accepted her apple as she had accepted her cheese, like an old friend; and when she attacked it she bit it bodily with hearty good-will, and made light of the peel. All these were trifles, if one will, but they were sufficient to show that a wide social gulf separated this beautiful young creature from her company, and that the chance which had thrown her as a guest and an equal into the hands of the proudest and most fastidious woman in the district must indeed have been an odd one, as she said.

The same kind of thing was manifest in her conversation. She did not speak like a peasant, but certainly not like a lady—rather as a shop-girl or an upper maid would have spoken.

"Have you ever been in Warwickshire before, Miss Lancaster?" asked Sir James Aitken during soup—

poor Lois, and that unaccommodating vermicelli!—by way of opening the ball.

Lois raised her starry eyes.

"No," she said with a certain hesitancy; then added: "You have the advantage of me, sir. I don't know your name."

"Aitken," said Sir James, smiling. "Sir James Aitken."

"Oh!" said Lois, relieved. "No, I have not been here before, Sir James Aitken," she then answered, content now that she could catalogue her companion.

"It is too soon yet to ask how you like it," he continued.

"I thought the scenery very romantic as I rode along," said Lois; "but I was not overmuch taken up with it. I like the mountains better. Do you live here, Sir James Aitken?"

"Yes; not far from here—at Aitken Park," he answered. "You must come over and see my place. I have some curious old Roman remains that will interest you."

"Thank you, Sir James Aitken, I'm sure. I shall be most agreeable," said Lois simply. "When shall I come?"

"I will arrange the party to-night," he answered kindly.

He was a man, hence more tender to the social short-

comings of a girl so lovely as Lois Lancaster than any woman would have been, and her odd mixture of propriety and unconventionality, stiffness and simplicity, amused him.

At this moment the salmi came round. Lois refused.

"No salmi?" asked Sir James, just as a silence had settled on the table.

"No, thank you, Sir James Aitken," answered Lois. "I've had as much as I've a mind for, and done very well, thank you."

At which Edith Grattan raised her bright, mischievous eyes, and looked demurely into Bernard's face.

"There is nothing so charming as idiomatic English!" cried Bernard boldly. "It is such a pity that we have refined it away into the tame and colourless language of conventional use. Had I my own way we would go back to the language of Shakespeare and Chaucer."

The step was wide, but Bernard's blood was up.

"Do you mean to say you would like us all to speak like the common people?" asked Edith, surprise dashed with indignation. Really Bernard Haynes, though very handsome and fascinating, and the owner of Midwood into the bargain, was almost too odd!

"A few racy idioms and pictorial expressions would be an advantage to us—they would lift up our daily

tongue and give it life and force," argued Bernard. "What you call the speech of the common people is only old English, pure and undefiled—the English, as I said, of Chaucer. If we went back to our forefathers' time we should speak as—as—the north-country people do, for instance."

"But I do not want to go back to our forefathers' time, if the result would be that I should speak like a common person. It would be very frightful to hear ladies and gentlemen speaking broad Cumberland, for instance, because that was the accent used in Chaucer's time," said Edith disdainfully. Lois, catching the words "broad Cumberland," turned her head to look at the young lady treading on her borders, fixing on her those calm, sweet, ravishing eyes which however, did not excuse in Edith's mind such a solecism as that of which she had been guilty.

So the dinner passed; Mrs. Haynes betraying nothing; Maud and Cora disturbed and uncomfortable and showing that they were; Lois uncomfortable too, but as quiet in her own way as Mrs. Haynes was in hers; and Bernard wondering what subtle change it was that had come over her, making her less supremely delightful than he had found her at the foot of Helvellyn.

When they rose to leave the room, Lois modestly stayed behind till she encountered Mrs. Haynes.

"Do you please, ma'am, to go forward," she said, shrinking back.

Mrs. Haynes took up her air of lofty courtesy.

"I am your hostess," she said with her grand manner and proud smile. "It is your place to go first."

"I would rather you went forward, Mrs. Haynes, please," returned Lois, meaning the perfection of politeness; but something in the lady's face seemed to compel as well as enlighten her, when she hurriedly brushed past both mother and son, and nearly tripped over her entangling train; Mrs. Haynes smiling to Bernard with cruel meaning as her eyes led his to the girl's awkwardness of exit.

Sir James, as a man of his word, made up the party which he had proposed to Lois during dinner; and the next day it was agreed that they should all go over to Aitken Park, to see the Roman remains and picture-gallery for which it was famous, when they would lunch there and come home to five o'clock tea.

In arranging how they should go, there was a question of riding; and Maud, Cora, and Edith all voted for horseback over the dulness of driving in the cold of an October day; when Cora said good-naturedly: "But we can scarcely do that, Maud; Miss Lancaster has no habit."

"Oh!" said Lois, "I don't mind for a habit, Miss Cora. I can ride in any old skirt you have

handy. We never bother about habits down at Wythburn."

"You cannot ride without a hat and habit," said Mrs. Haynes a little disdainfully.

"It makes no odds, Mrs. Haynes; indeed it don't," she repeated earnestly, and in her eagerness forgot her best style. "We don't fash about such things at the place where I came from, and I can do quite well with an old skirt, or even a shawl to lap around me."

"You forget, Miss Lancaster, that you are not at Wythburn now," said Mrs. Haynes with a smile that was neither genial nor reassuring. "You cannot ride in an old skirt, or even a shawl round you"—contemptuously—"and I should have thought that even you would have had enough perception to have understood that!"

"I meant not to give trouble," said Lois meekly.

"Pray allow me to arrange as I think best. You will give me least trouble by the most obedience," was the lady's reply; and Lois felt humbled and humiliated. But why? What had she done? According to her lights, she had done only what was right and kind and considerate; but she had evidently missed her way somehow, and had offended when she meant but to serve. Yet, if she had ridden, she would have shown them how to stick on, she thought, with the pride of one who, as she phrased it, could ride bare-

back as well as side-saddle, and who had never been beat by any beast she had yet mounted nor was afraid of the best that ever laid leg to ground. In the end, despite the opposition of Mrs. Haynes, it was arranged that Bernard should drive Lois in the pony-carriage, while his sisters rode with Charley and Edith Grattan. This was the best plan that could be devised, and suited every one save Mrs. Haynes.

When they were seated in the carriage and safely started, poor Lois drew a long breath as if a heavy weight had been taken off her; and turning to Bernard said, for her almost warmly: "My word! this is nice, Mr. Bernard! It is like home!"

"It *is* home," said Bernard fondly; "your home, Lois!"

"I like Wythburn best," she said. "I feel strange-like here, yet."

"You will soon get accustomed, dear," he returned. "My mother is very good and means everything that is kind."

"Does she?" said Lois. "Did I offend her just now, Mr. Bernard? I didn't mean to, I'm sure; but she didn't look best pleased at what I said about the habit. But I meant no offence."

"No, no!" he answered hastily; "she was not offended, Lois; she only wanted to put you right and make you understand."

"She was rather short, all the same," said Lois quietly; "but father, he is short too at times; and one must see and hear a good bit in this life and never take heed. Don't you think so?"

"I hope you will not have to see or hear much that is unpleasant at Midwood," said Bernard gravely.

Lois looked at him. Was he too going to be short like his mother? If so she, Lois, would not trouble him; so she lapsed into silence, and Bernard drove on, wondering if he should say anything to her that might help to bring her into more harmony with her new surroundings or leave things to work themselves clear, when—would that nameless charm by which he had been fascinated, and which now seemed lost, return? Perhaps; he hoped, nay more, he believed, that it would. It came back in part now, in this lonely drive together, when she was more natural and at ease, he less critical and more ready to be charmed than at the stately inharmonious home. All the same, it seemed to him that she had manifestly deteriorated since he parted from her at Wythburn, and that a nameless but undoubted change had taken place in her manners and appearance. It never occurred to him that the change was in himself, because of those domestic and social influences on which Mrs. Haynes had counted so much.

This little renewal of lover-like good-fellowship soon came to an end, and they reached Aitken Park where

they were met by Sir James and the riders, who had distanced them by taking a short cut across country.

The girls, ashamed of their uncongenial companion, visibly shrank from her in a way that said but little for the thoroughness of their good breeding, if we take good breeding to be more than the correct pronunciation of shibboleth. Edith was openly antagonistic, and Maud seemed to fear infection in anything like close association. Only Cora, good-natured, kind-hearted Cora, the dove and peacemaker of the company, kept with her; and Bernard was grateful, and mentally doubled the sum he would give her on the day of her marriage—whenever that might be. As he was naturally obliged to attend to Edith who looked to him as her assigned cavalier, while Sir James, playing host, singled out Maud as the representative lady, Charley and Cora had Lois between them; and, though both felt her something of a nuisance and wished her safe back at the foot of Helvellyn, both, being good-hearted and gentle of soul as well as of birth, treated her with consideration and made her as welcome as was in the nature of things. Occasionally however, they all got into a group together; and once they did so when they were at the Roman remains.

"How long ago is it since these old stones were set here, Mr. Bernard?" asked Lois in a rather high-pitched key. "Over three hundred years, I reckon?"

"Longer than that by two thousand," answered Bernard, who wished that she would not speak.

"And who was it laid them, say you?" she asked again.

"The Romans," answered Sir James.

Lois raised her dark-fringed, starry eyes.

"Were those the same as St. Paul wrote to?" she asked with a certain reverence, almost awe, of manner.

"The same people, but not the same individuals," said Sir James; while Maud flushed for vexation and pretty Cora, for all her kind heart, looked at Charley and giggled, girl-like.

"You should go through a course of ancient history, Miss Lancaster," said Bernard, more disturbed than he cared to acknowledge. "Did they not teach you history at school?"

"Yes, the Kings of England," she answered; "but not the Romans, except what the Bible says of them."

"What kind of school could it have been? What *did* they teach you?" asked Edith Grattan, who had taken, she scarcely knew why, the bitterest dislike to this beautiful but not fascinating young person.

"Needlework, and the Bible mornings and evenings, and reading, writing and ciphering, and such like, Miss Grattan," said Lois with the sublime contentment of ignorance.

"And nothing instructive."

"Miss Symes—Miss Symes was our mistress—called that instruction," said Lois, lifting her lovely eyes.

Miss Grattan smiled with calm disdain.

"I am afraid that would not pass muster with most lady principals," she said. "Modern education is rather more complete than that, is it not, Mr. Haynes?" to Bernard.

"Literature is not everything; there is a deeper knowledge which is more important, and Miss Lancaster has that," said Bernard loyally. "The mind is sometimes dumb when the soul is most eloquent. The sweetest songs are not those of most scientific precision or freighted with the greatest amount of learning."

"That is like you, Bernard! You are idealizing ignorance now. What a queer boy you are!" cried Maud petulantly. "We shall have you next finding the wrong to be better than the right!"

"How soon your people gets put out," said placid Lois to Bernard, when they were alone for a moment afterwards. "My word, but they are tetchy!"

"Lois!" remonstrated Bernard.

"Well now, Mr. Bernard, I'm sure you can't deny it," she continued. "Here's Mrs. Haynes as sour and sad as a Friday's child, and Miss Maud bites your nose off for next thing to nothing. I'm glad you're

sweeter-tempered," she added with a timid little smile and lovely fleeting blush, as she lifted up her eyes and looked at him with an unmistakable look of admiration. And Bernard, meeting that look, forgave her.

Aitken Park was as famous for its picture-gallery as for its Roman remains; and Sir James was naturally proud of a collection of Old Masters that would have been a not unworthy annexe to the National Gallery. He liked nothing better than to be the showman of his treasures; and part of the day's programme was to visit the gallery and hear him expatiate on its merits. Among other things there was a "Marriage of St. Catherine" which Sir James always maintained was better than that in the Louvre; and here the party halted while the host pointed out this fine line and that superb flesh tint, this marvellous bit of composition and that crafty combination of colours. He was an artist in his own way and had the artistic dialect by heart.

"The Marriage of St. Catherine!" at last broke in Lois with an accent of profound horror. "How could our Lord marry her when he was a baby? The Bible says nothing about it, Mr. Haynes"—to Bernard, indignantly—"it is downright impious!"

"It is one of the Roman Catholic legends, Miss Lancaster," Sir James explained.

"But it isn't true and it isn't right," said Lois. "It

is wicked to say such things of our Lord, and they not in the Bible."

"These old legends and saints' histories have given us some of our noblest pictures," Sir James apologized. "Art would have perished but for them."

"It had better perish than men paint what isn't true, and is blasphemy into the bargain," persisted Lois. "I reckon nothing of a thing that has to live as you say, Sir James Aitken, by such means. Give me the Bible and nothing else."

"Well, if it offends you we will go on to another," Sir James said good-naturedly. "I can understand your dislike, if you are not accustomed to such things."

This he said to stay the current of girlish disdain that had set in, and to give Lois "reason" before her superior companions.

"No, indeed," she answered a little proudly, as if boasting of a distinction; "I am not accustomed to such things, as you say, Sir James Aitken, and I don't hold with Papistry anyhow."

"You will have to enlarge your borders if you go on the Continent, I fear!" returned the host, smiling. "Every step you take and every place you visit will shock you else."

"I don't want to go among the Papists, Sir James," said Lois. "I am a professing Christian and don't hold with outlandish ways anyhow."

"Bernard!" said Maud in a low voice to her brother. "How could you allow mamma to invite this girl here to disgrace us with her ignorance and common manners in this way? What can Sir James think?"

Bernard threw back his poetic head.

"Do you not see any beauty, Maud, in the loyalty of a simple nature, a childlike creed?" he asked, his heart belying his reason. "There are two ways of looking at everything; why not take the more beautiful as well as the more charitable?"

"Because I like common sense and reality," said Maud disdainfully, also flinging up her head, but falling back to join the party. Contemptuous of poor Lois as she was, she was not inclined to let Sir James Aitken see too much of those glorious eyes which men seemed to think superior to learning or deportment.

Perhaps conscious that she had made rather a random shot in the matter of an Old Master, Lois discreetly held her tongue for the remainder of the tour round the gallery; perhaps too she was not incited to testify, as there was nothing of so purely a legendary character in the pictures after this unlucky marriage of St. Catherine; though one or two, where the drapery was of a rather diaphanous quality and scanty quantity, made the blood come up into her fair face hotly and lowered her eyes with shame. How ever could they! she thought; wondering at the ease with which the young ladies

stood before these undraped representations of humanity; it was downright indecent; and before the gentlemen, too! But her evident bashfulness only had the effect of making every one else uncomfortable and conscious; while, had she taken her lesson in art without wincing like the rest, they would have been perfectly at ease and with no thought of evil.

"What a horrid girl!" said Maud in sacred conclave with Cora and Edith. "Did you see how she behaved when we were looking at that Venus? She made me feel so uncomfortable, for I am sure Sir James noticed her by the way in which he hurried on; and the same when we came to St. Sebastian and that Cupid."

"She must be very indelicate to think anything," said Edith; but Cora suggested kindly: "Oh, she is so countrified, you see!—she has seen nothing, and I dare say it would shock any one not accustomed. For after all these undressed creatures are not very pleasant to look at for the first time!"

"Cora, how can you talk such nonsense!" cried Maud. "You will soon be as bad as Bernard."

"Poor Bernard!" cried Edith, laughing.

"Oh! he is a dear boy, and as good as possible," answered Maud briskly:—Edith must not laugh at him or believe him to be despised at home. "But he is an awful goose sometimes!" she added pleasantly.

"Is he a goose about this girl—this Miss Lancaster?" asked Edith with false calmness.

"Oh dear, no!" answered Maud. "He knows nothing of her, and cares nothing. It is only that he is too kind-hearted generally, and makes excuses for every one."

By which it may be seen that learning to say shibboleth as it should be said does not include truth as one of the obligations of the lesson.

The rest of the day passed without any very glaring misdeeds of Lois to excite the anger of Bernard's sisters and to awaken unpleasant emotions in Bernard's own heart. To be sure, she did everything in the way of table-gaucheries that she did yesterday, and got into continual entanglements easily discernible by educated eyes—knowing no more than a heathen what to eat or how to eat it. But she stumbled on, for the most part in happy ignorance that she was offending; and as Sir James and Bernard were kind and Cora was gentle and forbearing, her spirits gradually rose, and she bore herself with a certain amount of ease that showed her to advantage in some aspects, if to disadvantage in others. For, if she was less awkward because less constrained, she was more assured, consequently less guarded; and now and then let the natural flavour of Wythburn have broader scope—when she forgot that she was a lady and must not talk Cumberland nor make free.

Asked if she could play, she said "Yes," and sat down without hesitation to the magnificent Erard which even Maud, who was a proficient, touched with

a certain reverence. But Lois, thinking that her sole duty lay in doing her best and knowing nothing of how bad that best was, played her piece with the missed notes and slurred passages, the false chords and scamped bass of her kind; shaking her head and saying "Tut!" to herself when she tumbled on to flats and sharps where she had no business to be, and taking the whole thing with the mindless docility of a schoolgirl set to her task. But she looked so sweet and simple while she was murdering her music that Bernard, who was both tortured by and ashamed of her performance, was unable to feel really annoyed because of the naïve good faith and candour with which she made her fiasco; but the girls, with whom neither her simplicity nor her beauty counted in her favour, made wry faces to each other behind their screens, and Maud said quietly to Sir James: "Were you not rather cruel?"

After this they went back to Midwood; and Bernard's theory on the fusion of classes, and the advantage that would accrue to the race were gentlemen to marry peasant-girls, did not seem such a hopeless absurdity when he had lovely Lois with him alone, as it had flashed across him that it was when she was playing flats for sharps and missing whole bars serenely in "The Wedding March" at Aitken Park.

CHAPTER IV.

OUT OF PLACE.

The sudden change of habits and manners—from simplicity and porridge to luxuriousness and a French cook—from continual exercise about the house, gusty breaths of fresh fell-side air at all hours of the day, and small rooms, cosy and closely heated, to much sitting, little walking, and spacious apartments where she felt chilled and unhomed because she could not "sit into the fire" as she said, but did not feel warm or comfortable at a distance—began to tell on the health and spirits of Lois.

She was at no time robust, being of the kind which drinks tea and does not eat meat—which pinches its waist in stiff stays and goes in airy costume on bleak days, if so be that vanity prompts gossamer and repudiates woollen, catarrh and subsequent consumption notwithstanding; hence she had but a small amount of reserve-force wherewith to resist unfriendly influences, and with all her placid demeanour she suffered as acutely as those who are more demonstrative and outwardly excited.

The personal strain too, under which she was living also told on her and made her yet more nervous than before, hence more uncouth—and, by the vicious round of action and reaction, more distressed; so that altogether the visit on which she had counted so much while at Wythburn, seemed proving itself one of those Dead Sea apples of life which a mocking fate so often flings into our lap, charming to the imagination and bitter to the sense.

Ill at ease and uncomfortable, she had not even the satisfaction of any tangible cause of complaint. Maud was harsh and contemptuous truly, but then Cora was sweet and friendly; and though Bernard was a little perplexed and restrained before folk, on those rare occasions when he got her to himself, alone, he was all that he had ever been, and his faithfulness to the ideal he had created for himself was as unshaken as his tenderness. As for Mrs. Haynes, she continued to treat her unwelcome guest as she had treated her from the beginning, with cold and stately courtesy, seeking to make her conscious that she was an alien among them while fulfilling the law of politeness to the letter, only dropping out of the canon human kindness and womanly compassion. In the neatest but the most cruel way possible she dissected and displayed the girl's utter ignorance of all those things into the knowledge of which ladies of condition are supposed to be born as a

gift of race. She fathomed her deepest depth in literature and art—then showed her son, and all the world, how contemptibly shallow it was; she made her reveal herself as substantially uncultivated, unrefined, plebeian in her views of life, in her estimate of social obligations, and unable to rise to the height of patrician magnanimity, no matter what the gloss put on her by a gentle nature and the glamour wrought by her surpassing beauty. At every turn she made her betray her unfitness so plainly that Bernard, distracted between love and common sense, respect for his mother and loyalty to Lois, scarcely knew what course to take—more especially as all by which he was wounded was as vague as was all that by which Lois herself was pained; so that he, no more than herself, could put his finger on any one spot and say: "This is the core of my complaining."

Were they never to discuss art, for instance, because Miss Lancaster did not know Raffaelle from Rembrandt, and had heard as little of Turner as of Claude? Was all mention of the latest discoveries in astronomy to be tabooed, because, when she was asked, this unpromising young friend of theirs was forced to confess that she had no idea of how the earth went round the sun; thought that comets were balls of fire with their tails of streaming flames; held that the stars and moon and sun were things set in the sky for the good and delecta-

tion of man alone; and maintained that the earth was the centre of the universe? Were Shakespeare and Milton to be names without meaning for them, because Lois Lancaster did not know one from the other; confessing to have tried "Paradise Lost" once at boarding-school, and to have ended in weariness and tears? Were they all to forego their inherited breeding because she said "Mrs. Haynes" at the end of every phrase, and ate fluids as if they were solids?

Had Bernard remonstrated with his mother on her subtle cruelty, she would have opened her fine eyes on him with the look for which she was famous, and would have asked, with every appearance of surprise and interest, where she had failed?—and how could she act to please him if what she did now displeased him? Was it her fault, she would have said, if he had insisted on bringing into their circle one so entirely unfitted for her position? And did he expect them—his mother and sisters—to lower themselves to Miss Lancaster's very meagre standard of refinement and education? Whatever discomfort existed in the arrangements would have been shown as his own creation; and Bernard, conscious of all this, forbore to remonstrate—having also that difficulty which his mother intended he should have, in formularizing what was amiss, by which he ran curricle with poor Lois, also tormented and effectually gagged.

There had seldom been so gay a time at Midwood as now during the stay of Lois Lancaster. Every day Mrs. Haynes got up something fresh and fair for the young people of the neighbourhood; so that by the outside look of things she was doing the daughter of the Wythburn guide rare honour and paying her supreme attention. But somehow everything caused Lois increased mortification and showed her at a disadvantage; and when others were at the zenith of enjoyment she was at the nadir of distress. Amongst other pleasures, an impromptu ball was given at Midwood, none the less delightful because rather more informal than such things generally are. And to this, of course, came all the neighbourhood, still greatly wondering, and some greatly scandalized, at the continued presence as an equal at such a place as Midwood of this beautiful nondescript, whom no one knew where to place nor how to catalogue—fair as a flower, gentle as a dove, ignorant as a servant and with a manner in accord with her ignorance.

Now Lois had learnt dancing "at boarding-school," much in the same way as she had learnt music, and was about as proficient in the one art as the other. Style and execution were no more perfect in her feet than in her hands. If she played flats for sharps, struck wrong chords, slurred her shakes, and left out all the difficult bars without an idea of grammar or construction in

music, in dancing she swam when she should have walked, and hopped when she should have waltzed; but, in return, she did her steps on every possible occasion with conscientious fidelity, and she held her gown at each side, with her elbows turned out, as in the old days of Dutch skirts and sandalled shoes. She went through the whole performance with painstaking exactness, her sweet face at first serenely unconscious of any cause of ridicule in her proceedings—but as time went on, and she caught the amused glances of unfriendly critics and heard the half-whispered remarks with which the well-bred were not ashamed to overwhelm her, getting gradually perplexed—from perplexity passing to pain, as security became doubt, and doubt developed into certainty that something was amiss, and that she was not quite as others were.

Among the rest she danced with Sir James Aitken; but only once. Amused as he was at this new specimen of humanity, he had no desire to make himself sport for the Philistines and afford cause of ungodly ridicule to a room full of scorners; and pretty Lois Lancaster, ducking and pirouetting, hopping, curtseying and doing her steps with zeal, was a sight so unusual to people who had been educated in the art by the first professors, that it was scarcely to be wondered at if a proud man, and a sensitive, had not magnanimity enough to brave the smiles of his comrades for the

sake of giving a false sense of security to an underbred unknown. But his dancing with her at all was an offence to Maud, which went far to destroy all her pleasure in the evening—Maud, proud, reserved, well bred, and with fair average reason, but with not force enough to resist that meanest passion of the whole category, jealousy without cause of an inferior without attraction.

It did not make matters better for Lois, bad as they already were, that one of her young hostesses either studiously avoided her, or treated her when forced into momentary contact with a disdain so marked that every one in the room could see it. She was uncomfortable enough already without this to add to her misery; and her efforts to put these crooked things straight were certainly not crowned with success. At last, in despair, she plunged into the depths with Sir James.

"Patience, me!" she said, lifting her lovely face full of trouble to his; "what can have put Miss Maud so sadly about, Sir James Aitken? She looks as sour as verjuice at me; and what have I done, I wonder?"

Sir James raised his eyes and looked over to Maud, who, with a flushed face and discomposed air, was talking to young Charley Grattan by no means as if she enjoyed the circumstances of the moment, but rather as if she would have given worlds either to break into wrath or burst into tears. A smile broke

through the gravity of his face. It became almost radiant; and for a moment he had that look of effulgent delight which only the habitually melancholy show, when by chance a ray of happiness pierces the sober-hued integuments of their thoughts and they are joyous in proportion to their general gloom. Did she really love him? was this in truth jealousy? Love includes jealousy, thought Sir James; who also was on the wrong track this way. If he could convince himself through Lois that he was truly loved by Maud, how he would bless that odd young person and think kindly even of her dancing!

"I do not think that Miss Haynes is annoyed with you for any reason," was his reply, made quickly.

"Oh yes, she is, Sir James Aitken," answered Lois with seriousness. "If you don't see it, I do, and I shall just ask Mr. Bernard what's to do with her when I see him."

"Let me advise you, Miss Lancaster, to say nothing," said Sir James. "There is a great deal of wisdom in silence."

"But I don't like it, Sir James Aitken," said pretty Lois. "If anything's amiss I like folks to say it out, and not do as Miss Maud does, look black, a body doesn't know why. Oh! here is Mr. Bernard——"

"Come to take you down for an ice," was Bernard's hurried interruption; he, for his part, not caring to see

the girl appropriated any longer by the Baronet on whom his mother had fixed her eyes for Maud. As the master of the house his duties were naturally manifold and called him perpetually off guard, else, when he could, he had engaged Lois in talk on some pretext as now, or, dancing with her himself, had bravely borne as his burden the half of her artistic absurdities. But this could not be very often, and these moments of reprieve were, as she said, few and far between.

She was overjoyed then, when he came to her now to carry her off into the refreshment-room; and the instant she took his arm—she called it "linking"—plunged into the history of her wrongs against Miss Maud and those sour looks of hers which hurt her so much in her mind; saying, what was quite true, that she hadn't a notion what it was all about, and that she would sooner eat her fingers than offend one of the family. To which Bernard, heroically conquering the little spasm that crossed him at her homely metaphor, answered kindly: "I am sure you would, my dear girl. You have the sweetest nature in the world. Who would have the heart to offend you or be angry with you?"

"Then you think it may be only a maggot of my own?" asked Lois with a sweet smile. "If you do, Mr. Bernard, I'll not say anything to Miss Maud, for I'd not like to add fuel to fire, you know, and I'd bear a deal for your sake."

"I am sure you would," he answered. "But I hope, my dear, you will have nothing very bad to bear; and as for Maud, you are, I trust, mistaken, and she means nothing personal to you. Perhaps she has a headache. Girls often have headaches," he added pleasantly.

"Yes; I am often but poorly myself," said Lois, accepting his explanation simply; for indeed she was an amiable, single-hearted creature, beautiful in her nature so far as education and training would allow, and if not pushed beyond her powers always sure to respond true to a moral harmony. "So I'll say nothing about it, Mr. Bernard, but think that maybe it is a headache, as you say."

"You are always just and sweet-tempered, Lois," cried Bernard enthusiastically; to which the guide's daughter answered with a blush and a smile: "Hoot, Mr. Bernard! you flatter me."

And with this their time of retreat was over, and Bernard had to take her back to the dancing-room and leave her to herself, while he kept his engagement with Edith Grattan for the waltz that had just begun.

Mrs. Haynes, cruel only to be kind, as she argued in her own mind, took care that Lois should have plenty of opportunities for her damaging display of steps and hops. To be sure, as the evening wore on it became an increasing difficulty to find partners for this lovely

bungler. Her face was all very well, thought the young men; but style goes further in a ball-room than beauty, and proficiency in the art of keeping time and step is a *sine quâ non* for round dances as well as square ones. Wherefore, one by one towards the end of the evening they were all engaged when Mrs. Haynes asked them to take out Miss Lancaster; and at last, as if in honest despair at finding her good intentions of no avail, she said in a moderately loud voice to Bernard:

"My dear boy, what on earth shall I do? None of the men will dance with Miss Lancaster, and you can easily understand why. It is excessively unpleasant for me, yet what can I do?"

Bernard saw it all, and was on thorns. As his mother said, what could she—or indeed any one—do? This was no place for Lois. His mountain daisy, so beautiful in her own simple home, was ill set when transplanted to the artificial grace and conventional circumstances of a life like this at Midwood. There she satisfied his highest ideal; here—he was forced to admit it—she was inharmonious and discordant. And yet, was not his life to be spent here? Was not his home to be at Midwood, and his duties comprised in the ownership of the place? He could not live on the Wythburn crags or under the dark shadows of Helvellyn, forgotten and forgetting, as in last summer's

Long. He must take up the position into which he had been born, and fit himself into his sphere. These thoughts flashed like lightning through his brain while his mother spoke; but he gave words only to the first of them, when he answered, very coldly:

"You were wrong, mother, and cruel, to expose her as you have done."

"Which means, my dear boy, that when Miss Lancaster is Mrs. Haynes, Midwood must be closed against society at large," she said in a low voice, turning away to capture a young guardsman not quick at fence or falsehood, and present him to Miss Lancaster for the next lancers.

If Bernard who saw clearly was on thorns, Lois who saw but dimly was not on roses. The occult difference between herself and the rest became at every moment more confessed; and gradually her sense of humiliation worked on her nerves so powerfully that she was on the verge of a fit of hysterics. At last, escaping to the safe seclusion of her own room, she sat down before the glass and had what she herself called a good cry. She was unutterably mortified and wretched, she scarcely knew why; for the glass gave back a face which she knew well enough to be the loveliest of all in the room, and a general appearance with which, in her ignorance, she was perfectly content and wherein she saw no point of inferiority to the best among them.

None the less she was miserable and wished quite aloud at least a dozen times that she had never come; and she would go home to-morrow, that she would, and never set foot in Midwood again! If Mr. Bernard had to go with Midwood, let him. Mrs. Haynes and Miss Maud would take the sweetness out of honey itself, and make the very sunshine but a dree hillside mist! She could not bear it, and she would not; they would break her heart before they had done with her; and she would not have it, that wouldn't she!

When the housemaid broke in, singing, to arrange her room for the night and make up the fire, poor Lois, more at home with Mary Anne than with any of the grand folks with whom the mocking fate which gave the Dead Sea apples had thrown her for the time, frankly fraternizing, poured out all her troubles and wept like a sister on her neck.

"Why, miss, what's to do?" cried Mary Anne, amazed that any one should cry who had on a muslin frock dotted with a thousand sky-blue bows, and who had been dancing with real gentlemen in the Midwood ball-room.

"I feel so lost, Mary Anne!" sobbed poor Lois piteously. "I'm not myself here, and I've taken the rue for coming."

Then said Mary Anne briskly, having her own private suspicions of King Cophetua, and thinking to

herself that if she could she would put any number of spokes possible into that wheel: "La, miss, if you'll not mind my saying so, you're no fit company for our folks!—you're not the same kind as our young ladies; and it's a shame of them to ask you here and make game of you as they do. You're best with your own, and it's my advice that you go back to 'em sharp. You and I are not so far different when we come to measure things, and I'm sure I couldn't do as you do—make free with a family as grand as missis's."

"Why did they have me here if they wanted to make game of me?" cried Lois, indignant through her distress.

"Ah, why indeed!" returned Mary Anne. "That's best known to you and the young master. But I'll tell you what," she added with a burst of virtuous scorn, "these grand folks are precious mean when you get close to 'em. And that's the blessed truth!"

"I'll go away, that I will!" cried Lois, still sobbing.

"Yes, I should," said Mary Anne coolly; "and you'll be best at your own home."

"Oh, Mary Anne, how badly I do feel!" said the poor girl, turning pale.

"Have a cup of tea, miss," the servant answered. "There's nothing like a cup of tea when you are out of sorts."

But Lois fainted before the words were well uttered;

and Mary Anne, ringing the bell, brought up a small army of fellow-maids, who stood about the girl and conjectured, asserted, pitied or condemned according to the calibre of brain and direction of thought belonging to each.

"You left the ball-room early last night, Miss Lancaster," said Mrs. Haynes the next morning at breakfast. "Were you fatigued or indisposed?"

She spoke coldly, as if fatigue or indisposition were an offence deserving rebuke; and she looked with a kind of surprised annoyance at the girl's pale cheeks and sunken eyes which sufficiently betrayed her discomfort.

"I didn't feel myself very well, Mrs. Haynes," answered Lois rather shakily. She could have repeated last night's fit of weeping under very slight provocation indeed.

Bernard's soft eyes looked sympathetic and distressed.

"Were you not well?" he asked with the unmistakable emotion of a lover.

"Oh, not badly to mind about, Mr. Bernard," answered Lois heroically.

"Was the dancing too much for you?" asked kindly Cora.

"Maybe it was, Miss Cora," Lois said with a jerk, grateful for the suggestion which was so well calculated to conceal the real cause. "I'm not used

to it, and I'm only delicate. A very little does for me."

"Then you should not have danced so much," said Mrs. Haynes, always with that subtle accent and manner of condemnation which seemed to place Lois Lancaster as a culprit before her, whom it was part of her daily duty to rebuke.

"How could I hinder myself, Mrs. Haynes?" asked Lois, opening her eyes. "When the young gentlemen asked me if I was going to dance, and seemed to want to take me out, how could I give them a back-word?"

"You are not obliged to dance with every one who asks you," said Mrs. Haynes with her superior smile.

"But I wanted to, Mrs. Haynes," said innocent Lois, goaded into spontaneity. "It isn't pleasant to sit by oneself when one sees all the rest as gay as gay; and it's a treat I don't often have."

"Then don't complain if you suffer," said Mrs. Haynes.

"I didn't complain, Mrs. Haynes," Lois answered with unnecessary earnestness. "It was yourself as asked me if I felt myself poorly, and I said I did. I didn't mean to find fault," she added, her eyes filling with tears.

"No, mother," put in Bernard; "Miss Lancaster did not complain. She never complains of anything."

"No?" said Mrs. Haynes coldly; while the poor

girl's tears dropped slowly on her plate; "then we need not pursue the subject. And pray, Miss Lancaster, control yourself a little better than this. People do not cry like children in public—at least, not the people with whom we are in the habit of associating." Which speech of course had the effect of making Lois cry still more and of deepening Mrs. Haynes's displeasure.

After breakfast Bernard watched his opportunity. Mrs. Haynes was always careful to prevent his getting apart with Lois; but this morning she was obliged to attend to some business that would not wait, and her son took advantage of her absence to endeavour to console his disconsolate beloved. He himself was to the full as wretched as she was. He saw quite plainly that his mother whom he loved, and his future wife whom he adored, did not "get on together;" but, beyond this elemental perception of things, he was lost. He thought that perhaps Lois might know more than he knew, and, as was perfectly natural, he felt sure that it must be somehow in her power to change the present discords into harmonies, and that, if any blame was to fall anywhere, it must righteously fall on her head. It was her knowledge of this natural decision which had made Mrs. Haynes so certain of her game and so resolute to carry it to the bitter end.

"Lois, my darling," he said tenderly, "what is it

that makes you and my mother jar so perpetually? I had hoped everything from your visit here, but somehow things seem all to go wrong, and nothing that I can say or do mends matters in any way. What is it, Lois?"

"I'm sure, Mr. Bernard, you'd better ask Mrs. Haynes, not me," answered Lois with an ominous quiver in her voice.

"I wanted you so much to be friends," said Bernard with almost pathetic earnestness.

"It isn't my fault, Mr. Bernard, indeed it isn't," said Lois, the tears beginning again to start. "I've done all I could to be agreeable to Mrs. Haynes and the young ladies ever since I came, but I don't think they like me; and the more I try the more they seem to snap me. Not Miss Cora, though, I must say," she added generously; "she has been as good as gold to me; but," beginning to cry outright, "Mrs. Haynes and Miss Maud, they can't abide me, and that's the whole tale from beginning to end, Mr. Bernard."

"But, Lois, dearest Lois, cannot you make things better?" he cried with the illogical insistence of a man's disappointment.

"No, Mr. Bernard, that I cannot," she answered weeping; "and—I'll not tell you any lie about it—I've taken the rue for coming, and want to go back home."

"Lois," he cried, "you do not mean that, I am sure!"

"Yes I do," she said; "I'm best at home. This isn't the place for me, Mr. Bernard, and I was just a silly gowk for coming. You're all over grand for me, and I'm a sight too simple for you. I'm best at home," she repeated.

"You *are* at home," said Bernard, taking her hand. It was a well-shaped hand in essentials, but it was not the hand of an aristocrat.

She shook her head. "No," she said; "no, Mr. Bernard. This is no home to me, and never could be."

At that moment the servant entered the room with two letters on a tray for Lois, and "Mrs. Haynes desires to see you, sir," as his message for Bernard.

"I will be back directly, dear," said the young lover tenderly as he turned away, Lois answering unselfishly, as her manner was: "Don't put yourself about, Mr. Bernard. Don't trouble about me. I've got father's letter to read;" again dissolving into tears as she rose from her place and went over to the window, carrying not only her father's letter, but one from John Musgrave as well—to soothe or sting the smarting sore of her wounded spirit.

She read her letters, still standing by the window; and then her hands dropped by her side, and her soul went back to the past and the beloved. The fresh free

life of the fells came like a burst of sunshine in the gloom of a winter's day across the memory of the poor, fevered, uncomfortable girl. She saw visibly before her the lovely little Thirlmere Lake, with Dale Head, its mansion, grander to her than even the palatial stateliness of Midwood. The crags and fells rose up to her inward sight, clothed in their russet of autumn, their purple and gold of summer, their greenery of spring—beautiful always; her friends and companions always; things that were like living creatures loving her and sympathizing with her, knowing her and understanding her. She knew that she was out of place here, and she felt that she must take her courage in both hands and break her bonds before they had cut more deeply into her soul. She knew where her best wisdom lay, and she must conform to its demands. John Musgrave, who was her friend, would counsel her to do as her own heart was counselling her now; and John Musgrave would not have led her into circumstances which were in real fact no better than so many snares—circumstances wherein he knew, as Bernard must have known, that she would suffer and be pained. John Musgrave was at her feet, and would be translated to heaven upon earth if she would but return home and smile on him. And now that she had seen him nearer, Bernard did not seem so fine a fellow after all. He was under his mother's thumb too much for

Lois, whom that thumb oppressed and crushed; she preferred a more vigorous independence, like John's for instance; and a man who would be proud of her, and not ashamed.

The old passion of home that possesses the heart of the mountaineer came upon Lois with its loving sickness, its infinite yearning. She felt as if she could not breathe in these cold, spacious, unhomelike rooms; she must go back to her simpler mode of life, to her mountains, her crags, her mere, her home. Bernard Haynes and all his grandeur were as nothing to her compared to the loveliness of her own. The daughter of the fells, born and reared in the shadow of Helvellyn, she must go back to her cradle, else she would pine away and die; she must shake herself clear of the false dream that had bewitched her if she meant to see happiness or fulfil her allotted length of days.

Mrs. Haynes found her standing thus by the window in the drawing-room, those two dirty, crumpled, ungrammatical and ill-spelt letters, which had been the awakening magicians, still in her hands; her lovely face softened by its yearning dream; her mind lost, her thoughts away; but, through the dream her resolve slowly consolidating and fashioning itself to an intelligible course of action.

The lady walked up to her with her noiseless, stately step; and Lois, starting, made a little curtsey and said

with perfect respect but no assumption of equality: "Mrs. Haynes, ma'am, if you please, I leave here to-day."

Mrs. Haynes bent her head.

"The carriage shall be ready for you at your own time," she said, her handsome eyes flashing with sudden pleasure. "By what train?"

"The soonest that will carry me, Mrs. Haynes, if you please," Lois answered. "I have my things to pack, and then I am ready."

"I hope you have not had bad news from home?" asked the lady politely, glancing at the letters in the girl's hands.

Lois lifted up her beautiful eyes, again filled with tears.

"Thank you, Mrs. Haynes, father's quite well; but I'm best at home," she said. "It was a pity I ever came."

"I think so too," answered the lady significantly; "but I do not think you have any cause to say so. You have been well treated."

"No, Mrs. Haynes, I have not been well treated," said Lois with a husky voice. "You and Miss Haynes have made me feel that I am not good enough for you; all that I could do and say would not make you cotton with me, and I have been miserable ever since I came. But don't think I want to force myself where I am not

wanted," she added. "I have a home, if it is small; and I would rather be in my own with father and them as loves me than be here with all of you, where no one but Mr. Bernard can abide me; and he don't stand up for me."

On which she broke down; and retreated sobbing from the room.

"Poor girl!" said Mrs. Haynes to herself, pitiful now because victorious. "I know that I have been cruel; but what could I do? It was destruction else; and Bernard will live to thank me, as will she. That dear, foolish boy, with his dreams and absurdities, to imagine that he could begin Communism and inaugurate Utopia at Midwood! What an abyss I have saved him from; and how cleverly I have managed him!"

CHAPTER V.

LIKE TO LIKE.

If Bernard was to fulfil his mother's prophecy and live to thank her for preventing his ruin, that time was evidently not at this present date. If he was "viewy" and unpractical, because young and romantic, he was neither fickle nor unloving; and his affection for Lois was as sincere as his dream of the future they might have made together, had but a friendly fate permitted, was impossible. Her virtues were of a kind specially delightful to him in his present phase of thought; they were virtues which upheld his ideal of fraternal equality and made it seem reasonable as well as good; while they deepened his revolt against caste distinctions and the vices of his own order whereby such an angel as Lois Lancaster was excluded and abased. Hence he had wished to make her his wife almost as much for moral reasons as for personal liking, and drew as much comfort from his reverence as joy from his love.

When, therefore, she left in this abrupt way, almost at an hour's notice, declining to give any satisfactory explanation because declining to have any private

interview with him; refusing his escort to the railway station; saying only, when he pleaded and remonstrated: "I will write to you, Mr. Bernard," and: "Please not to press me, Mr. Bernard, I have my reasons," and the like—the poor lad fell into the despair to which we all succumb when the fool's paradise in which we have been living melts into thin air and leaves us only the rugged rocks of the sterile desert—when our gods lie shattered at our feet—stocks and stones no more divine than ourselves.

But despair, tears, protestations, what not, it had to be borne; and lovely Lois Lancaster went off, according to her desire; unattended and in silence; but leaving behind her the distinct impression that all was over between them, and that she, the beggar girl, declined the offer of King Cophetua to share his purple, and preferred her own native rags instead.

"You have broken my heart, mother," cried Bernard with a boy's self-abandonment to sorrow.

"My dear boy, I have saved you from destruction," was his mother's reply, made calmly from the heights of superior wisdom. "Had it not been for me you would have been lost for ever; but I rescued you just in time."

"Saved! Rescued! You call forfeiture of my word, breaking my promise, destroying a noble woman's happiness and my own for life, salvation, rescue!" he cried

bitterly. "I shall never see her equal, never! She was an angel—simple, sweet, strong, pure! You did not know her, mother, because you would not. You were prejudiced from the beginning, and you saw everything through a false medium."

"You mean that you did, my boy," she answered. "What I saw was a pretty and creditable young woman, well-mannered for her station if ridiculous enough when brought into a false equality with such as ourselves; a young woman who will make a capital wife for a well-to-do farmer or small tradesman, where she will not have too much hard work to do, but who, as the wife of a gentleman, would have dragged her husband into the lower levels of society and would have ruined the prospects and position of his whole family. That is what I see, my son, and I think my eyes have been the clearer."

"And your heart the colder," flashed Bernard, stung by love out of his ordinary filial respect.

She bent her proud head in acquiescence.

"Yes, my heart the colder because my reason the keener," she answered, fixing her bright eyes on him steadily; "and reason goes farther than fancy."

"And wisdom—the best wisdom—the wisdom which accepts things, not appearances,—goes farther than that cold, dead, godless thing you call reason!" said Bernard, pacing the room feverishly, prepared for a month's

close arguing; which his mother cleverly avoided by going into the dining-room and giving some unnecessary orders to the butler.

Difficult as Mrs. Haynes found her boy in the first hours of his disappointment, he was slightly more amenable than Lois found her father. If a young man's crushed love is hard to soothe, what is an ambitious man's crushed hope when his cunningly devised schemes are torn into shreds, and the cup which has touched his lips is dashed to the ground before he has tasted the rich wine on which he has counted as his life's future food? Fond, in his dry way, as old Lancaster was of Lois—a fondness greatly helped by his faculty of arithmetical calculation—proud of her as a bonny thing to look at, and lonesome as he found his home without her—the beershops getting the good of her absence—he had no fair greeting for her when he returned late in the evening from Keswick, and found his daughter in her every-day dress, sitting by the kitchen fire as if no possibility of a grander time, when she should be a lady with waiting-maids at her feet, had ever crossed her days; as if she were content to live and die in the poor obscurity into which she had been born.

"Why, Lois, lass, how's this?" he cried as he strode in, shaking the wet from his dripping clothes and staring at her as if she had been the Armboth Bogle—so at least

she told John Musgrave some time afterwards, when Bernard Haynes and Midwood and her chances of advancement had all sunk back into the phantasmagoria of a feverish dream.

"I have come back, father," Lois answered laconically.

"Ay, lass, a blind man could see that!" he said. "But why, for mercy's sake?—that's what gets over me!—why?"

"Because I was not suited and was not wanted where I was," she said with a certain soft dignity that was infinitely touching; "and because, father, I made a mistake. These grand folk are not for me, nor I for them, and I've done with them for ever!"

"Softly, my lass; softly there! You've got to reckon with your father before you've wiped that chalk off the door," cried old Lancaster with an expression on his face known only too well to Lois. "We dalesmen are not of the kind to be taken up and laid down again like a bit of stack peat. That young man, that Mr. Bernard there, he courted you; and by the Lord he shall wed you or I'll know the reason why!"

"No, father, he shall not," said Lois; "for I'll not wed him. He'd be willing, fast enough, whatever his mother and sisters may say, but it's me as cries off. I'll have none of him, not if it was ever so!"

"And I say you shall!" said her father sternly.

Lois lifted up her head.

"I'll not wed where I don't love," she said, very quiet in her manner, pale as to face, resolute as to accent; "and I find that I don't love Mr. Bernard Haynes as I ought if I was to be his wife; so I'll not make believe the thing I can't swear to as certain sure."

"We'll see, my lass; we'll see!" was his reply. "If there's been foul play between them all we'll see to its being righted, or my name's not Tim Lancaster! I'll have no young fly-by-night coming here after my girl, and then crying off when he finds he's changed his mind."

"Father!" she interrupted a little scornfully as well as angrily. "Don't I tell you that it's me who has cried off, and not Mr. Bernard who wanted to get shot of me? How can you go harping and harping like that on such a foolish word when I tell you the exact contrary, as plain as tongue can speak? I wouldn't marry Mr. Bernard Hayes and have to live at Midwood yonder, no, not if he was made of gold; so now! They ain't the sort for me, and I'm not the sort for them; and I'd rather never have a name to my back at all than a name I didn't agree with and hold by. Leave me to manage my own affairs, and I'll not ask your help."

"You're a fool," said old Lancaster coarsely. "Such a chance doesn't come twice in a lifetime, and you've got your fortune in your own hands."

"I only rue that it came once to me!" cried Lois, bursting into tears. "I know I'd have been saved a sight of money and a vast of trouble if I hadn't been fool enough to think that I was fit to wed with a gentleman like Mr. Bernard Haynes, or that I could ever be the like of his mother and sisters!"

"The long and the short of it is just this, Lois, they've been badgering you," cried old Lancaster, ruffling his grizzled hair in his wrath.

"They behaved as fine as if I was one of themselves," answered Lois with a mental twinge at the falsehood which she felt herself compelled to make for peace' sake; "but I came to my senses while I was there, father. It wouldn't do for me to wed with Mr. Bernard. He is too far away from such as us, and nought but sorrow would come of it."

"And his money?" cried old Lancaster with an oath.

"Father, when I marry I'll marry the man, not his money," she answered coldly.

"Marry!—when you marry, lass, it will be some poor crazy old tinkler, I'm thinking, if this is the way you are going to carry on," said her father passionately. "Who, in mercy's name, but yourself would have given up such a chance as this?"

"Every honest girl who held herself as she ought, and who disdained to push herself where she was not

wanted," Lois replied, holding her head high; "and I tell you again, father, I'd rather eat my fingers off than wed with Mr. Bernard Haynes to have to live at Midwood with his mother and sisters. So that's plain; and I can't make it no plainer!" Saying which she retreated with dignity to her own little room upstairs, and, taking her slate, wrote on it the first draught of the letter of renunciation which to-morrow's post was to bear to Bernard Haynes.

Life is simple enough and action easy while our feelings are single and not complex, while our motives run clear and are not entangled; but when desires pull passionately to the left and reason warns us loftily to the right, when self-interest and self-respect are at war together, it is difficult to decide on our best course; and even when decided on it is difficult to follow. This was the case now with Lois. She knew quite well what she ought to do, and she intended to do it. Still it was hard. The vision of her grandeur had been very seductive while it lasted and before it had been tested; and, naturally enough, it was a trial to put off her regal gold and purple and come back to her dull homespun. But it had to be done.

She had never been deeply in love with Bernard. He was not the kind of man whom she would have chosen for himself, and before every one else in the world, to be her husband. He was too refined in

thought, too subtle, too much above her head to be completely sympathetic with her; that well-to-do tradesman of her earliest aspirations was more the kind of thing to suit. A county gentleman, with views, was altogether beside the mark; and she was sufficiently reasonable to confess all this to herself—and to act as she confessed. Also, she knew full well that, as she had said to her father, she was entirely out of place among his people. Her self-respect in this had been wounded; it must now reassert itself. She must show them all—that proud woman more than all—that she, the daughter of the fells, had too much independence of character to force herself into a family which did not want her—to marry for money one whom she found that she did not really love. All the same it was a sacrifice; and she suffered while she made it.

But she did make it; and gallantly. She wrote her first copy on the slate, and by care she managed to write it correctly. It was without care and by the spontaneity of nature that she wrote it with dignity. She sent these few lines, she said, to wish Mr. Bernard and them all good-bye—to break off the engagement between them—because she was not fit for them, and they could not make her feel at home with them, and things that went wrong in the beginning generally finished off worse at the end. She saw that she was

in Mrs. Haynes's way and that she could do nothing to please her; and it was best to part now, before it became harder to do. He had better keep to his own, she said—and the tears fell fast as she added, renouncing for ever all her splendid hopes—she would keep with hers; and not all the world could offer would make her go through another such time as she had had at Midwood, or induce her to see him again or carry on with him in any way. She ended by wishing him and them all health and happiness and by being his obedient servant, Lois Lancaster.

So ended the dream of the beggar-girl and the endeavour of our modern King Cophetua to lift her to a place beside him on his throne; so ended the new Utopia planned by the young reformer—the regeneration of society that was to follow on the sons of the aristocracy taking to themselves wives from among the daughters of the peasantry. It was a prosaic sermon on a poetical text, a halting *envoi* to a gracious idyl; but it was inevitable, as things stood, and the only way of wisdom open to either.

"Now, my dear," said Mrs. Haynes to her daughter Maud, after she had read the letter which Bernard flung over to her in a paroxysm of despair and she had failed in her first attempts to soothe him; but she knew quite well that time would do what she had not been able to do, and that he would live to be happy in

her way and to thank her for having saved him from his own; "now, was I right or wrong? Had I opposed this mad passion of Bernard's he would have married out of hand. He was fascinated for the time, and saw all things as he wanted to see them. Quietly letting him prove for himself the incongruity of the whole matter, letting the impossibility show itself, saved him and us. Ah, Maud! a silken thread makes the best driving-rein a woman can have when she has to deal with man; and to check while seeming to permit is the only way to secure the command."

She smiled radiantly. She was pleased with herself and her method; and success repaid her for many a bitter moment.

"You are always right, mamma," said Maud, clinging to her with a gesture of special fondness.

"And the young woman has behaved admirably," returned Mrs. Haynes; "with great good sense and dignity; that I feel bound to confess."

"Yes," said Maud with a happy smile; "most admirably. I quite like her now."

Mrs. Haynes looked at her daughter keenly.

"So has some one else, I fancy," she said with meaning. "Can I read you, my Maud?"

The girl hid her face on her mother's shoulder.

"At last!" she breathed with a happy sigh. "Oh, mamma, I am so happy!"

"I knew it would come, my dear," said Mrs. Haynes. "I am charmed, for you will now be at rest, my Maud; all the same, I never doubted it."

"I did, mamma; once—when that girl was here," said Maud.

"Yes, we were in danger certainly then," returned her mother; "and we should have been lost for ever had Bernard carried out his mad design. But we were saved, you see; saved without loss—*quitte pour la peur!*"

"And you managed so well, mamma!—and I was so stupid and impertinent!" Maud said with loving penitence. She was so happy that she was glad to be repentant; it seemed to add to her present delight to say how far she had failed in the past.

Her mother smoothed her glossy hair.

"This is the reward for which we mothers long," she answered; "that our plans should succeed and our children acknowledge our foresight and good sense. Now we must think of settlements and your trousseau, my darling; and next year perhaps we may have to repeat it all over again for Cora."

"With Charley, mamma?"

"With Charley."

"I thought so!" cried Maud. "Dear little Cora, what a sweet little wife she will make! How much I wish that Bernard would marry Edith!" she added with a little sigh.

"So he will some day," said Mrs. Haynes. "He is broken-hearted now, poor boy—or thinks that he is—and that this young woman from Wythburn is the only creature worth a second thought in the world. He swears that I have ruined his happiness for life and that he will never marry any one if he cannot have Miss Lancaster; but I know him better than he knows himself;—and some day he will marry Edith Grattan."

"That will be delightful!—what a happy family party!" cried Maud, kissing her mother enthusiastically just as Sir James Aitken rode up to the door, and the first chapter of her book of betrothal opened.

It was a curious coincidence—but then life is made up of curious coincidences—that on the evening of the very day in April when Bernard disappointed his mother's hopes and formally refused to propose to Edith Grattan, Lois, who had been but pale and wan all through the winter, was standing out for a moment by the garden gate at Brigend, watching the last rays of the sun slowly passing from the fell-tops when John Musgrave came riding by. John had been a good deal on and off at the house this winter; and folks did say—but then folks say a vast they have no call to, as John always answered when attacked on the subject—that he had helped old Lancaster out of a pinch which else had threatened him severely—that pinch for the need of which he had blustered to Lois loud and long, and

sworn that he would take the law of young Bernard Haynes and make him smart for his villany. It did not make him lower his voice to be told that he had not a hair's-breadth of standing-ground. He was angry and disappointed; and when men are in a rage they do not care much for reason. John's help however, tided him over the worst part; and he, for his part, was by no means sorry to be of use to Lois Lancaster's father. It made the future bright and the present very sweet, and it seemed somehow to redeem the mistakes and disasters of the past; and it made Lois tender and patient with her rustic friend—gratitude gilding the rough metal which might be accepted but could not be denied, and rendering all that was homely beautiful and comely.

"Eh?" he said as he came up. "You out in the damp like this? Are you doing wise-like, Miss Lancaster? Aren't you best indoors?"

He spoke with an indescribable accent of tenderness, his fine blue eyes bent on her with grave and serious affection.

"It is very mild, Mr. John," Lois answered, blushing vividly.

"But you are very frail," John returned, hitching his horse to the rail and passing through the gate to place himself by her side. "We must take care of you, you know. Good gear's bad to spare!"

"You are very good to think so much of me, Mr.

John," she said, playing with her ribbons, and looking supremely pretty if a little awkward.

"Do you like me to mind you as much as I do?" returned John in a lower voice.

"Yes" said Lois, looking down.

"I don't fash you when I care for you?"

The words seemed somehow to choke him; and he waited for their answer as a man waits for the verdict which will give him life or death.

"No," she said.

"You mean that, Lois?"

"Yes, Mr. John; I mean it," she replied.

He clasped her in his arms.

"Eh, my lass!" he cried, his voice broken with emotion; "you've made a proud man of me to-night! I've waited for you, Lois, as patiently as Jacob waited for Rachel; and I've oft wondered if it would ever come! And now it has; and you do mean it, lass?"

"Yes," repeated Lois bashfully but firmly. "I do mean it, Mr. John."

"And you can make yourself happy with a rough farmer body like me; you as is a lady?"

"Yes, I'll be happy," she answered.

He put back her face tenderly, almost reverently, and kissed her fresh, fair lips.

"My lass!" he said, straining her to him "like's best to like, and love's more nor gear. The highest lady in

the land shan't be better cared for nor you—shan't be happier or more looked to; and, as for me, I'd not change my place to-night with a crowned king on his throne!"

"Yes," said Lois, and she meant all that her words implied; "like's best to like, as you say, Mr. John; anything else is of no good. But many a body goes the wrong road that way, and it's a good job when they find it out before it's too late."

"I'm not too late, am I?" asked John, with the foolish repetition of one asking to be assured of that of which he is already convinced. He was only a lover, poor fellow, and no wiser than his kind.

"No," said Lois; "you're in time, Mr. John."

"And you mean it?" he reiterated.

She laid her hand in his.

"There's my hand on it," she said frankly. "Now do you think I mean it?"

"I do, my lass! I do!" he answered, kissing her a little strongly; Lois making a feint to resist, as she gasped breathlessly:

"Oh, Mr. John, such ways! Well, if ever I saw the like!"

THE COUNTESS MÉLUSINE.

THE COUNTESS MÉLUSINE.

CHAPTER I.

The world was dull and life was very dreary to young Anthony Carthew; and all sorts of strange unanswered questions gathered heavily upon his heart, like the sad dreams which oppress the mournful. For what was he living?—to what aim, end, purpose or intention? For pleasure?—pleasure in the dullest of societies and the most uninteresting of countries? For ambition?—what ambition was there for a daily tutor in Stoneleigh, whose best pupil was the exciseman's eldest boy, and whose noblest energies were fulfilled when he had ground his "hic, hæc, hoc" into the unwilling brains of half a dozen farmers' sons? For a pleasant home-life of love and sweet affection?—but his possessions in that way were not rich enough for the needs of the poorest heart. With a half-sister, much older than himself, who usurped the domination without granting the tenderness of a mother and who thought that the

fit guidance of youth meant the suppression of its instincts and the annihilation of all its joys,—with only such a companion as this, there could not be much love shut up for him within those four walls called by courtesy his home. So that, turn which way he would, his whole life seemed barren and his very existence a mistake.

Anthony was not unreasonable in his discontent; for in truth never was there a more comfortless life than that which Rachel Carthew provided for her young brother in that miserable house of theirs. Old maidenism was stamped on every square inch of the naked cleanliness and exasperating order which she had a grim delight in scraping round her; and even mild, well-conducted, sober-tempered men were tempted to commit unusual domestic crimes for the sake of breaking the hard lines of her hideous regularity. All gloom and narrowness—all repression and domination—in such a melancholy dungeon as this Rachel thought to forge the links and grappling-irons which were to save her youthful brother from external evil, and anchor him to the safety lying in the calm of home affections. Can you wonder, then, that Anthony was weary of a life which gave him only such a stagnant pool as this for the bay which held its choicest pearls?

Fifty at the youngest, stiff-backed, lean, bony and inexpressibly sour-tempered, Rachel Carthew was a living

protest against every grace of womanhood and every suave delight of life. No one had been ever known to love her—not even when she was young and what people, who measure beauty by length of inches and weight of bone, call a "fine woman;" and now, of course, such a contingency was out of the question—she was as far removed from love in any of its forms as if she had been one of the Gorgon sisterhood unearthed. But the hardest have a soft place somewhere; and even Rachel had her preferences. The soft place in her heart was given to a certain little Nelly Blair, the daughter of the Stoneleigh attorney; who thus was admitted into the *huis clos* which so few had found means to penetrate.

Nelly Blair was a pretty little creature of the apple-cheek order; with large light-blue eyes, well shaped but inexpressive; a fair, round, fat face; a short, blunt, positive nose; red lips, neither full nor wide; a figure made up of a succession of circles; and with a temper as even as a bowl of fresh milk. Such as she was, she was Rachel Carthew's chosen friend; and Rachel had her designs on her friend's future fortunes. Now Anthony well knew what those designs were, and gave way to them according to the habitual indolence of his character, according to the deference he always paid his sister and according to the pliancy of the discontented and unhappy. The suit went by Rachel's ruling; and in

due time Anthony, cheated by the crying need of sympathy into the belief that he loved Nelly Blair, who, by the way, was the only girl of his own age and condition with whom he was acquainted, made his proposal in proper form and in proper form was accepted. For though he was only the village teacher of Humanities, he was not poor; and though Nelly was the attorney's daughter, she had no portion. So that they were about equal in rank and condition; and neither could despise the belongings of the other.

And now Anthony thought he should be happy; surely yes—was he not loved and did he not love? But, to his shame as well as to his sorrow, the dead-weight was not lifted from his heart nor the shadow on his life lightened. He was not happier than he was before; and often a great deal more bored, because less alone. For the rest, Rachel was grimly satisfied and Nelly temperately content; smiling when her handsome lover met her and smiling just as placidly when he left her; smiling if she said: "What a long time since I have seen you!" and smiling in precisely the same curves and depth of dimples if she said instead: "What! here again so soon!" In short, Nelly was always the same. She lived in her small world of crochet-work and household duties, of jams and pickles and bead-purses and cunning economies, with a calmness and equanimity that likened her to a monotonous

plain without thorns, weeds or flowers; or to a waveless lake beneath a colourless gray sky, tossed by no passion and beautified by no reflection. Doubtless she was very good; but she was horribly uninteresting.

Anthony was angry with himself that he was not more contented; for was he not truly, really, devotedly in love? Rachel said he was, and Rachel knew everything; and Nelly was satisfied—and would she be that if he failed even in the smallest particular? It was said young girls were exacting; and she was doubtless like the rest.

More weary and melancholy than ever, one day Anthony plunged into the only square yard of copse to be seen for miles round Stoneleigh. It was *the* wood of the neighbourhood, and might have been an acre cut out of the Black Forest for the magnificent ideas of gloom and grandeur associated with it by the Stoneleigh people; and naturally it was a favourite place with Anthony, with his romantic tendencies and insatiable love of nature. Lost in his own vague dreamings, his head buried in his hands, over which his picturesque black hair hung thick and wavy, Anthony's senses were closed against the outside world, when suddenly a voice, most rarely sweet and musical, asking with the daintiest dash of foreign accent: "What was the name of this wood?—and in which direction was Stoneleigh?" woke him to the knowledge that a lady was standing before

him. Confused and startled, he sprang to his feet, and his eyes met two large hazel orbs fixed with a strange perplexing expression on his face.

"This is Beech Copse, madam; and Stoneleigh lies to the north," stammered Anthony.

"Thank you; you are kind," said the lady, still keeping her perplexingly beautiful eyes fixed steadily upon him. "And you, monsieur—forgive me the liberty—but do you, too, live at Stoneleigh?"

"Yes," said Anthony, blushing.

"I am glad of that," she answered with a low sweet laugh; "for I am your neighbour now, and shall hope to see you sometimes at Oakfell Hall."

"Oakfell Hall!" echoed Anthony in a tone of surprise. "In its ruined state, how can you be there, madam? It is years since it was inhabited, and it is little better than a ruin."

"I am usually very rapid in my movements," said the lady with a singular smile. "I took the place only a few days ago, certainly; but if you will do me the pleasure of paying me a visit, you will I think agree that I have not lost my time. Will you come?"

Anthony stammered something, he scarcely knew what; but it was sufficiently unintelligible to pass for an assent; and the lady accepted it as such.

"Adieu then, monsieur!" she said. "Remember, I count on seeing you at the Hall; and soon—the sooner

the more charming." She waved her hand, then passed with a pretty, light, balancing step round the clump of gorse that grew beside them. Anthony saw her light-blue summer robe flutter through the golden lacings of the blossoms, and it seemed as if heaven itself had fluttered away in its folds.

With a magnificent burst of stoicism he left the copse and came out upon the open common; and there, walking in the direction of Stoneleigh, he saw the flutter of a light-blue robe and a graceful head turned back towards the road; one small fair hand holding the chestnut curls from off the face. Was the air so marvellously clear to-day that every line and hue and movement of that figure should be preternaturally distinct?—or was it, in very truth, a chapter of glamour? and was Anthony under the spell of an unblessed fay? A couple of centuries ago he would have thought himself possessed, and would have straightway gone to a priest to be exorcised. Now, with the light of science slanting in his eyes, he spoke reasonably to himself of nerves and liver, of the virtue that lay in calomel and black-draught, and of the foolish excitability of those who dwell much alone in country places. But he was bewitched nevertheless.

CHAPTER II.

"Who has taken the old Hall, Rachel—Oakfell Hall?" cried Anthony, in a rushing headlong kind of manner. He was out of breath and heated, having run all the way home in the hope of overtaking that gracious form gliding so swiftly before him: and he had been disappointed.

"How did you know it was taken at all?" said Rachel stiffly. She was displeased at his abrupt entrance and more abrupt manner.

"Never mind that, but tell me the name of the person," said Anthony, still more impatiently.

"When you address me with becoming respect, I may reply to you; not before," was Rachel's frosty answer.

"Pshaw! I meant nothing disrespectful, sister. I only want to know the lady's name."

"How do you know it is a lady?" asked Rachel again, with a quick suspicion in her glance. "You are very odd to-day, Anthony."

"Why, sister?" he answered, forcing a laugh and putting on a caressing manner that was as false and strained as the rest. "What is there odd in asking

the name of a new tenant of the old Hall? I heard it was let, and I simply wished to know to whom, as any one else would wish to know. It was a piece of ordinary gossip, surely not surprising."

"Well—there! that's enough about it, boy! I don't know her name and I don't want to know it. She has no name at all, I dare say. Very likely she is an adventuress, and thinks it best to leave her old address behind her." Rachel smiled grimly; her gruff wit pleased her.

"Rachel, you are absurd," cried Anthony angrily; "and uncharitable beyond bounds. It is really too bad—a stranger whom you have never ever seen—to at once conclude evil; it is too revolting—too unwomanly!" Anthony was in much agitation when he spoke, and kept his face turned away.

Rachel opened her eyes. In all the years of her young brother's life, during which he had submitted to her uncomfortable authority like the most dutiful son, he had never spoken to her so disrespectfully as now. She turned upon him savagely, and while rolling out her deep-mouthed peroration, the door-bell rang and Nelly Blair entered.

Vapid and unmeaning—with those abrupt decided manners which have no grace in them, and dressed in the singularly unbecoming fashion delighted in by staid young ladies in the country to whom beauty of

toilette is a sin, and who cannot, for the life of them, divorce elegance from frivolity, fashion from worthlessness—Nelly offered such a painful contrast to the beautiful stranger whom he had just met, that Anthony felt like one who had been blind or crazed, and whose senses were that moment restored. Had he ever really loved Nelly?—thought her lovely or found her lovable? Was that the portion which life had meted out to him? and was he to accept it with thankfulness? Surely it was all a dream, a hideous dream, from which his guardian angel had awakened him before too late while standing there by the golden gorse in the beech-wood copse. Nelly was not sensitive, and her heart gave her no revelations. She shook her lover's hand just as usual; looked into his pale face with her usual smile; caught the earnest piercing eyes upon her own just as placidly as ever; then turned to Rachel amiably, and brushed her corkscrew curls by way of kiss.

"Well! the Hall is taken at last," said Nelly, sitting down in a fat little bundle, and unfastening her bonnet. "Queer, tumble-down old place! I am sure I wonder at any one living there; don't you, Rachel?"

"Who has taken it?" asked Anthony quickly.

"Oh, a foreign woman; the Countess Mélusine, or some such name. Who she is I don't know, you know; but father drew the agreement, and she signed herself the Countess Mélusine—such a heathenish name too! Oh,

Rachel, ain't it a good thing?—father has agreed with Joe Styles to draw his coals, and Joe will do it for a shilling a week less than what we paid old Ned. I am so glad! And, Rachel, how did your potted beef turn out? Mine was all spoilt. I put in too much pepper, and father coughed himself nearly into a fit. Pity, wasn't it, such good stuff to be wasted?"

"For how long is the agreement made, Nelly?" asked Anthony, kicking up a square of drugget, much to Rachel's displeasure.

"With Joe Styles?"

"No, no, Nelly! Can you never rise out of the kitchen?" said Anthony scornfully. "I mean the lady's—the Countess Mélusine's—for the Hall."

"Oh, I don't know, I'm sure, Anthony. But how she runs in your head! What is it to us how long she stays? She will very likely be too proud to notice us."

"Anthony, I cannot understand you," said Rachel very sternly. She had kept her eyes fixed on her brother for some time; and Rachel, though narrow, was sharp.

"Perhaps not, sister. Did you ever understand me?" With which the young man flung himself out of the room, swinging the door after him in no very gentle fashion.

"Anthony's queer to-day," said Nelly equably, as she threaded her needle. "What is the matter, Rachel?"

"I cannot tell you," said Rachel, straightening the disordered square with angry hands. "The letting of the Hall seems to have upset him somehow. I think that foreign woman has bewitched him."

"Dear me!" said Nelly laughing. "Well, that is odd, now! Why, I have never thought of her twice! Men are queer folk, Rachel; not half so rational as women, after all."

"Some are not, certainly," said Rachel; meaning Anthony as the apex of the world's pyramid of fools.

After what was to Anthony a constrained and most wretched evening, but which seemed to Nelly just the same as all other evenings and to Rachel neither more nor less filled with foolishness and the waywardness of life, the lawyer's daughter, to her lover's profound relief, prepared to go home. Never had he felt her presence so oppressive nor her society so uninteresting; never had Rachel appeared harsher, less womanly, less admirable; never had he felt himself less suited to his companions, more lonely in heart or more desirous of escape. He could think of nothing but that beautiful stranger who spoke to him so kindly in the wood, whose smile had made his life a glory, and whose friendship seemed as if it would be no unworthy foretaste of heaven. He could render no account to himself for the persistency of his thoughts. Youths of his age and temperament are rarely introspective, and for the

most part content themselves with feeling, without caring to examine; and Anthony gave himself up to the tide without seeking to fathom its depth or discern its outlet. Time enough for that when the harbour was reached or the wreck came.

The weary night passed, and the dull morning broadened into day. But the hours seemed to Anthony to lag as they had never lagged before—as if they were all halt and lame, staggering one step where formerly they ran two—until he stood at the lodge-gate of the Hall. Had a magician passed through that ruined place? or how was it that the waste and desolation which had grown round the Hall in its seven years' desertion had been removed with such marvellous speed? The tangled shrubbery was thinned and trimmed; the broad walks, which had grown green with moss and weeds, were newly gravelled, hard-rolled, smooth and firm; the lawn was closely mown, and from rank coarse grass spangled with ox-eyes and the bitter hawkweed, had turned to moss close-grown and fragrant; the flower-beds had been cleared of their waste of nettles and groundsel and were now gay with the choicest flowers; while the house itself was changed in all but the mere outside lines—trellis-work, paint and gilding, marble and paper and cement transforming its whole appearance and creating a palace from a ruin. But the marvel of it all was the exceeding celerity

with which the transformation had been accomplished, and the unostentatious manner in which it had been done.

Anthony was bewildered; and while looking about him, almost superstitiously—"I have been expeditious, monsieur, have I not?"—said that sweetest voice which the world had ever heard; and the Countess stood noiselessly beside him.

In her fresh morning dress, with the soft wind blowing her chestnut curls loosely over her face and giving a warmer tinge to her fair cheek, with her strange eyes so full of hidden meanings looking at him more kindly than woman's eyes had ever looked before, her smiling mouth and graceful figure, she seemed more than mortal to the young country tutor, accustomed only to the dull dowdyism of Nelly Blair and the rest of the "second set" in Stoneleigh. He scarcely knew what he answered. He blushed, hesitated, stammered, much as a young Greek shepherd might have done if a goddess had suddenly revealed herself. And something never felt before rose up within him; the inner depth was for the first time struck, the living spring for the first time opened. The acquaintance was not twenty-four hours old, but already it had stolen from Anthony the sacred treasure of his life.

How the time passed he never knew. He thought

he had been about an hour, perhaps a couple of hours, at the Hall, when the sunset fell and the moon came out. He had spent then, the whole afternoon and part of the evening in the gardens with the lady, and had taken his delight in such deep draughts that he had scarce been able to understand its flavour. But if Anthony had been unconscious of all save feeling, the Countess had done her appointed work with vigour and understanding; and long before parting-time had come had learnt the names, biographies and rent-rolls of every family in the neighbourhood, their weak points and their strong ones, where they were most vulnerable and where they were intact. Anthony was too much absorbed to notice the greedy interest which she lent to this description; too much fascinated by her grace and kindness to ask himself why she cared to know all these minutiæ of people whom she had never seen, or of what possible interest it could be to her that young Mr. Briggs had two thousand a year and old Mr. Smith four; that the Hopgoods were the principal friends of the neighbourhood; that the Joneses—retired Liverpool merchants—were said to play at ruinous stakes sometimes; while Captain MacArthur was a professed gambler and lived by the Baden tables.

If Anthony had looked at his companion as he detailed this last bit of local gossip, he would have

seen that she changed colour and slightly frowned, while something that might have been a naughty expletive, from the sound, rippled musically over her lips. But he paid no attention to this, nor to the inexplicable half-muttered exclamation: "Ready made to my hand!" said in the sweetest and gentlest of voices, with the brightest of glances flung far over the landscape.

The Countess laughed. "I could tell you more than this, Monsieur Antoine," she said pleasantly. "My friend M. le Baron von Guldenstern has told me a pretty little nest of secrets—perhaps more than you know of here in your virtuous little valley."

And then Anthony was gracefully dismissed, the dinner-bell having rung: and midway in the broad walk a fair soft hand joined itself with his, and the loveliest of hazel eyes looked with swimming gentleness upon him, as two small dewy lips parted, and a voice as sweet as a young bird's expressed pretty thankfulness for the honour of this long visit, and many gracious hopes that it would be soon repeated, and that they, the speakers, joined now hand in hand, would become firm friends and great allies. Whereat the delicate palm gave an almost imperceptible pressure against his, and the dewy lips smiled a tenderer smile.

"For he is really very handsome and his innocence is quite delicious," she said, speaking to her maid, to

whom she related the substance of this long day's talk.

"Well, and after?" said that individual, in French, seating herself familiarly by the Countess on the sofa.

"Well!" answered the lady, yawning. "It is a good field, my dear, and a safe venture. And now to dinner; for, oh, I am so hungry!"

CHAPTER III.

The Countess Mélusine became the rage at Stoneleigh. Flattering letters of introduction from the Baron Guldenstern, a Hanoverian nobleman of unquestionable standing, to the Hopgoods, who were the leading people of the place, gave the pass-key into every house beside. For the Baron was a great friend of the Hopgoods, and one whose notice somewhat honoured them; so that any recommendation of his was sure of eager acknowledgment. But among all her adherents none worshipped her with so much singleness of heart—the infatuation of none struck so deep or soared so high—as the young teacher's. To him she was a revelation, a being from another world; it was adoration rather than love that he felt for her; and he could have died for her simple wilful pleasure with as much rapture as other men would have lived for their own. And she—perhaps she pitied him; perhaps his innocence and ingenuousness touched her; perhaps even another feeling came in;—be that as it may, she spared him.

The great events of the present year at Stoneleigh were the balls and parties given by the Countess at

Oakfell Hall. The wealthy Joneses and the superior Hopgoods both asserted that they had never seen anything equal to them in their way; and if aught had been wanting to confirm their admiration of their new neighbour, it would have been the faultlessness of her entertainments. They were subjects of conversation and imitation for years after, when the whole thing had exploded and gone to the winds. To be sure, the play was very deep and the fair Countess was no coward in her laughing bets; to be sure too, no one ever seemed to win, and the beautiful hostess herself always protested most strenuously of all, how she had been victimized; complaining in her fascinating accent of the cruelty of her guests and their inhospitality to a stranger and a foreigner.

"It was very odd," Mr. Jones used to say when counting up the stakes, "very odd indeed who had got them all!" And Mr. Jones, as a retired Liverpool merchant, was pretty well up to gambling in all its aspects.

Very odd too, was it how often the best cards turned up at the right moment in the hand of the Countess; and how that pretty graceful way of shuffling of hers seemed to bring her good luck: "As, indeed, it should, as a reward of its gracefulness," said Mr. Briggs gallantly, though somewhat ruefully as well, as he disbursed his golden losses.

The only person who held off from joining in this universal choir of homage was Captain MacArthur. Between him and the lady existed a something—no one exactly knew what—but a certain mute distrust on his part and a scarcely veiled defiance on hers. He went less to Oakfell Hall than any one in the neighbourhood, and often he used to say: "I cannot think where I have seen the Countess before, but her face seems so very familiar to me." Once he made the same remark to her; but she answered him so haughtily, so much as if the assertion were an offence, that Captain MacArthur thought it needful to apologize and assure her he was mistaken. Still, there was nothing like open hostility between them; and the frequenter of the Baden tables simply forbore to adulate her like the rest; he never spoke with positive disfavour.

The most curious thing in her social tactics, was how she contrived to be secretly on better terms with half her society than came out in public bearing. Almost all the gentlemen in turn were admitted to private consultations in that delicious little boudoir hung with blue and silver, that "gave off" from the drawing-room, as she phrased it; but specially and most frequently might young Mr. Briggs and old Mr. Smith have been seen there by those of the curious who had cared to penetrate the secrets of the Hall. But no one knew of their long, earnest, gracious collo-

quies in the little boudoir of blue and silver; no one knew that even Mr. Hopgood spent many a half-morning closeted there with the Countess in the freshest and most becoming of morning toilettes, and with the daintiest and most delicate of "slight refreshments" on the table beside them; no one knew that Mr. Jones, more than once, told the partner of his bosom a whole chapter of fibs to conceal the fact that he had passed hours at the Hall under a spell of blue and silver, and old Rhenish wine in cut crystal goblets, and floating muslin and chestnut-coloured curls, which for ever culminated in a tangible result better not detailed at length;—no one knew all this, or what those *tête-à-têtes* meant, or whether it was ambition or intrigue, love, money or politics, that animated the Countess Mélusine and made her life the busy web of secrets that it was. The most carefully guarded secret of all was the ultimate purpose of this blue-and-silver boudoir off the drawing-room.

More noticeable than her secret intimacies with the moneyed men of the district, because more open, was her daring patronage of young Anthony Carthew. She invited him to her revels, where the Hopgoods in their silks and flounces and severe local aristocracy and the Joneses in their flighty haughtiness, were assembled as by right; and she bore down the opposition which would have swamped a less popular

innovator. And her *protégé* did not disgrace her. With the tact of an inborn gentleman, he carried himself with quietness and dignity; not making himself conspicuous in any way and even catching something of the tone about him. And though it was all new to him, no one who saw him in those brilliant rooms, modest, frank and beautiful as became his youth, would have supposed that he was making his novitiate and that all, even to the proper mode of address, was a new study to him. In one thing he was markedly distinct from the rest; he never played. The Countess forbade him the card-room; and he was too happy to obey her desires to wish to infringe them. He was the only one in the place who knew of those secret colloquies in the boudoir, and he used at times to be vaguely fearful, mutely uneasy, as a faithful hound might have been; jealous of his mistress—but jealous for love not self-seeking. But the Countess never neglected him. On the contrary, she petted him openly in her *réunions*, as she called them; made much of him, and kept him always about her; praising his manners, his face, his talents, to every one around, and raising him, by the might of her popularity, to the startling equality of recognition even from the Hopgoods themselves. Six months before he would as soon have expected a bow or a "hand-shake" from the Head of the Empire himself. But the daytime gave

Anthony his dearest pleasures, more so than even those brilliant vivid evenings. He was rarely twenty-four hours away from the Hall, excepting when the boudoir was tenanted by a rival. Whole days would pass like minutes, while he wandered in the garden by the side of the Countess, whose varied knowledge and sparkling wit enthralled him quite as much as her beauty or her gracious kindness.

In the mean time what did Nelly Blair? and what the austere Rachel? They held themselves aloof from the popular current and predicted all sorts of shameful couchings to the popular blindness. Nelly at last began to see that Anthony's life was centred in the Hall, and that he had become indifferent to her even to neglect. Rachel had long seen as much; and she fumed and raged and even wept for spite—but all as unheeded as if she had been but the boisterous wind or the angry rain lashing the distant fells.

Nelly took it much more quietly. She would listen placidly to Rachel's fierce wrath, and, when she had ended, would give a light sigh and say: "Oh, he'll come round, Rachel! He is very young, you know; and I always thought him rather foolish; but he'll come round in time. Let's wait and see, and not trouble ourselves too much about him, Rachel."

CHAPTER IV.

One day Anthony was at the Hall as usual, in the blue-and-silver boudoir. The Countess had never looked more beautiful than she did to-day and had never been more charming. Her manners had a warmer shade than usual, and were more familiarly caressing; and, for the first time, she spoke of her private affairs. Hitherto she had only alluded incidentally to herself as the daughter of a prince with a barrow-load of consonants, and a name unpronounceable by any but a compatriot; or as the widow of The Count. She never gave *his* name, though the German Baron had written it in his letter of introduction, but so ill, that whether it were Russian or Roumaic no one on this side Babel could tell. For the rest, she was the Countess Mélusine. From speaking of her parentage and condition, touching feelingly on the various troubles she had undergone, and letting her sweet eyes, beaded with heavy tears, rest lovingly on Anthony's eager face as she spoke of death and disappointment and the fresh heart's early sorrows, she glided by easy transition into the more worldly matters of money and expense.

Lightly and without complaint, laughing in her natural bird-like manner, she confessed to a tiresome momentary embarrassment and to her need for a paltry three hundred pounds—just for a few days; certainly not longer than a week; merely to pay an insolent tradesman who would not wait her convenience. And then she appealed to her *cher* Monsieur Antoine to tell her—she so ignorant of English business—how she could raise that three hundred pounds; for see! touching her bracelets and pointing to her furniture—what grand security she had to offer!—and jewels and plate, she had often heard men say, were only consolidated bank-notes. And again she laughed; but her cheeks were paler than before and her dark-brown eyes were troubled.

Anthony's whole fortune was just one compact three hundred pounds,—his, though his sister dealt with it as her own, even sometimes, when irreflectively irate, threatening to leave it away to strangers. Simple boy! he had told this to the Countess the very first visit he had paid her; but he had forgotten now; and her request came as an unhoped-for opportunity to be of service. Eager, proud, glad, he spoke to her of this sum, which to him seemed, as indeed it was, a fortune. "And would she not honour him by taking it? She might repay it at her leisure, for he could scarcely hope that she would honour him so far as to accept his

little offering as a gift. Yet he would be so glad, so proud, to offer it. Would she not render his whole life blessed by the remembrance that once he had been enabled to spare her half an hour's embarrassment? Would she not prove the sincerity of her friendship for him, and test the loyalty of his devotion, by suffering him to aid her? Oh! would she not grant him this, when if need be he would aid her with his life?"

Powerfully moved, but respectful as ever, he took her pliant hand and pressed it between his own, all his honest love in his eyes and quivering like sunlight over his face. In the lady's eyes flickered a painful half-frightened glance. She looked fearfully at the door, then bent forward with a caressing movement, as if to thank him. And then a longing loving look veiled that painful glance; her cheek flushed, her lip quivered and tears gathered up into her eyes; she laid her hand on the boy's forehead, and with a voice full of genuine tenderness said sadly: "No, no, my poor child, not you!"

"*Maudite bête!*" growled Justine, the maid, watching the scene through the keyhole. "She shall pay for this!"

That touch sealed Anthony's fate. He flung himself at her feet; he did not know what he said, scarcely what he felt; he only knew that the barrier was

broken down and that the love which had hidden deep in his heart, scarcely daring to confess itself in the silence of his own thoughts, now leapt forth into the life of words.

The Countess Mélusine was used to hear men talk of love, but this was something different from her uses. She listened gently, tenderly; and tears more than once fell from her eyes. Then stooping forward, so that her scented hair fell lightly over the young face upturned to hers, she put her arms with a gesture of almost maternal tenderness round his neck, and kissing his forehead, said softly: "My child, my poor boy, you know not what you ask!—you know not whom you love! I had a little dream of escape, Antoine," she whispered; "but that——"

"*Madame est servie*," said Justine, entering abruptly.

That night a ruffianly-looking man drove up to the Hall-door.

"The game is up, my lady!" he said insolently, sweeping up some of the more portable valuables. "They will be here to-morrow morning. Come! you have no time to wait. Get together all of your best; the rest must go. *Sapristi!* what is she at now?" he cried, as the Countess stood pale and as if stunned. "Come, come, madame! none of those airs, if you please! Bustle about and help Justine there; and

if I find that you have not played your part well, you know what you have to expect. How now! Justine! Justine! quick! the fool has fainted!"

Before morning the Hall was deserted. Noiselessly, and without disturbing the English servants, the three accomplices withdrew; and by the time the noonday sun brightened over Stoneleigh, a couple of detectives held Oakfell and every soul in the place knew the story.

"Tricked, by Jove!" cried old Mr. Smith; "and my three thousand."—

"And mine!" swore young Mr. Briggs, with a large percentage of expletives.

The Hopgoods said very little. It never came out publicly whether they and the Joneses had been swindled or no, or, if they had, to what extent. Only Mrs. Hopgood complained to her daughters, some months after, that their dear papa had grown very close lately, very, and that she was afraid he had met with heavy losses unknown to her; and Mr. Jones rode over to the County Bank the morning after the explosion and spoke privately to the manager. The Hopgoods wrote to Baron Guldenstern to learn more of his fascinating friend and *protégée;* but, as soon as the post could bring it, they got an answer, saying, that he knew nothing whatever of any Countess Mélusine, wife or widow, and certainly gave no letter of

introduction to such a person for his good friends the Hopgoods, or any one else; but, he added, about four years ago he, as well as all Baden, had been victimized by a certain beautiful Madame la Baronne Mélusine and her sister Justine, who acted as her maid, both of whom belonged to one of the cleverest and best-organized bands of swindlers in France or Germany. And perhaps his good friends the Hopgoods had been visited by these worthy people, who unfortunately had got into his confidence and purse; when, if so, adieu to all hope of reclamation of Britannic gold!

That letter was the Hopgoods' writ of exculpation. By it they obtained public forgiveness for their tremendous mistake in having stood sponsors for an impostor to the choice society of Stoneleigh; and public sympathy for their supposed victimization completed their whitewashing.

"Then she did cheat at cards, after all!" cried Mr. Jones. "I had my suspicions all along; but who would have listened to them? Indeed, how could I have tested them? She was deep and beautiful enough to have cheated the——ahem! She was, though, the little baggage!" with indignant reminiscences of the blue-and-silver boudoir, and of the heaps of lies piled up on his innocent wife's credulity.

"And that's why she always fought so shy of me," laughed Captain MacArthur. "I saw her once or

twice, under the title of Madame la Baronne, at Baden. She was just beginning her career when I was leaving. Lord, lord, what fools we have all been!"

That evening a more painful rumour ran through Stoneleigh. It was said that young Anthony Carthew had destroyed himself;—some said poisoned, others that he had hung himself, and others detailed a circumstantial account of how he had blown out his brains. But all agreed that he was lying dead in the boudoir at Oakfell Hall. And, too surely, there he lay lifeless on the very spot where only yesterday he had passed through the courts of paradise. A letter in Italian, praying for forgiveness and ending with "*Io t' amo*," a lock of shining chestnut hair and a faded bouquet, were in his hand; and on the sofa, beside the torn envelope of a packet, lay a valuable diamond ring. The Countess, before they left the house, found means to make up this packet which she threw, unobserved, into the little garden before Anthony's house as they passed it in the gray dawning. The ring was the most valuable piece of property that she had; and its loss entailed on her both insult and ill-treatment.

An inquest was held, but neither poison nor mark of violence was discovered; a ruptured vessel in the heart sufficiently accounted for the death. Perhaps it was as well. The sun had set for the poor boy for ever: what joy would he have had through a long unending night?

As the funeral passed the house of Lawyer Blair, Nelly, in her new mourning, looking up from making apple-jelly, wiped her eyes and said sobbing: "Poor Anthony! poor fellow! he was very handsome and clever and all that; but see how foolish! Poor Anthony! I am sure I loved him as much as I could; he need not have gone after a foreign swindler like that! Oh, Sarah, Sarah!" in a tone of anguish, "what are you doing? Don't you know that apple-jelly burns if you don't keep on stirring it?—and you with the spoon out, gaping like that! Come, give it to me, do! and go and set the tea."

MILDRED'S LOVERS.

MILDRED'S LOVERS.

"Such presumption!" said Mrs. Lyndon, the stock-broker's wife, frowning; and: "Such forwardness!" returned Miss Manvers, the lady *par excellence* of the establishment, tossing her head.

"A man with five hundred a year and expectations!" said Mrs. Lyndon disdainfully. Mrs. Lyndon, though at present in difficulties, had married, as people say, above her; and was consequently very bitter against *mésalliances.*

"And one who cares nothing about her!—as how could he, such a plain little hodmadod as she is! Quite forced, as one may say, into paying her attention!"

"I have no patience with that's girl's boldness!" sneered Miss Manvers, who, by virtue of traditional beauty in her youth, had a private patent for propriety, being supposed to know what temptation meant. So they settled it between them, that poor Mildred, the

daughter of the house (it was a boarding-house) was an arrant little minx:—and there they left her.

Mildred came into the room a moment after they had so prettily arranged her, as the French say, with her shy look and queer, embarrassed step, as usual—a step that seemed to stumble over itself, as if her feet were too long at the toes and caught in each other's way. She always walked too, with her head down and her eyes cast up from under her eyebrows. She was very short-sighted as well as nervous, and her shoulders and hands were conscious and restless. She was not so pretty as interesting in face; and as she attracted more attention than many handsomer women, this, of course, was a truer criterion of her powers of pleasing than mere regularity of line and feature. She was quaint and original and clever—sarcastic too, and said odd, out-of the-way things; she knew how to put old matters in a new light; and had always something striking to add to every discussion, which made other people feel that they had been very tame and commonplace and stupid: and she sometimes ventured on extremely beautiful illustrations, all in her little nervous, hesitating, unequal manner; and intellectually she was worth half a dozen of the fine ladies who despised her with such comfortable contempt. Then she was young and had good eyes—those large, dreamy, innocent, short-sighted eyes which she was

fully conscious were good, and which her way of looking up from under her brows made yet more remarkable; and she was openly slighted by the ladies because she was poor and because she flirted—a combination of offences which few women forgive. And she had a good deal of artistic taste and feeling, which always lightens up a character; so that in consideration of all these facts, the men paid her vast attention; and she generally had one or two flirtations on hand at the same time—the intricacies of which she managed with the skill of an old general.

The foolish child rejoiced in her triumphs—as perhaps was natural; and managed to display them before her main enemies, Mrs. Lyndon and Miss Manvers, without showing that she did so intentionally—as perhaps was only natural too, though unwise. But Mildred, in her secret heart, was one of the most reckless creatures imaginable, like many other quiet and compressed people; and at any time would have hazarded all her future for the pleasure of half an hour's public success. It was so glorious to be able to revenge herself on those who despised her, by showing them that she could triumph both over them and fate; and that meanly as they thought of her, there were others who placed her far before even them; and that though they looked on her with contempt, other people worshipped her with enthusiasm—with

other like thoughts and feelings always busy in a slighted woman's brain. But she had to pay dearly for her naughty pride afterwards, poor little soul!

While she was fidgeting over the music-books, looking for something—she had forgotten what already—Mr. Kelly lounged in. Mrs. Lyndon and Miss Manvers glanced at each other, and each lady drew herself up tight in her particular corner of the sofa, with a soldier-in-a-sentry-box kind of a look, that told plainly enough they were on guard and could not be bought off at any price.

Mr. Kelly was the gentleman alluded to in the opening conversation; that boarding-house miracle, a man of five hundred a year and expectations. He was always very attentive, according to his own notions of attention, to Mildred Smith; or, as Mrs. Lyndon phrased it: "was being taken in by that artful girl." And as he was the richest and best born man of the establishment, his regard was a great deal prized and pronounced decidedly too good a thing for Mildred. And more than once he had been attacked both by open accusation and covert sneer about her, and had been asked: "When the day was to be?" and she had been alluded to as "the future Mrs. K." And if by chance she was absent at dinner, Kelly was exhorted to keep up his appetite; and delicate things were pressed on him because he was down-hearted and could

not eat; with sundry other well-known arts by which hostile and vulgar women prejudice men against one of their own sex in the beginning of an affair. But Mr. Kelly, who was a curious, loose-limbed, lounging fellow, enamoured of old curiosity shops and all manner of out-of-the-way things, did not care much what any one said, whether in praise or ridicule; but shambled on in his own way and made queer love to Mildred, to the scandal of the other ladies, mainly attracted to her because she was about as odd as himself, in a different way. She was morally what a rare bit of Dresden, or a monumental brass, or a unique species of scarabæus or trochilus, would have been artistically; and he valued her accordingly.

He went now direct to the piano where she stood, speaking to her in his slow, drawling voice, with all the words looped together by a thin line of sound and all the a's pronounced as aw's. But he spoke gently and flatteringly too. The sentinels glanced again; and Miss Manvers broke the knot of her netting by drawing the stitch too sharply home. Mildred coloured as she answered his question—it was only: "What was she looking for?"—speaking in her queer little way, half glancing up and half turning her back—or at least one shoulder—with a coaxing, pretty kind of shyness that makes a man inclined to treat a woman like a child.

"I am looking for 'Herz, mein Herz,'" said Mildred, peering over the pages and fluttering them about.

"Can I help you?" he asked, lounging on to his other leg and shuffling with his elbows on the piano.

"No, thank you, Mr. Kelly."

"May I never help you?" he added in a lower voice; but very much as if he had asked the price of a marble Venus or an embroidered stole, it was so lazily and shamblingly said.

"Oh yes! perhaps I shall some day ask you for your help, very boldly," said Mildred, looking straight into his eyes; and looking so that the sentinels could see her.

"What the deuce does she mean?" thought the possessor of five hundred a year. "Does she understand me, or is she only playing with me? Or is she as innocent as she pretends to be and knows no more of love than she does of archæology?"

"Will you be kind enough to copy this for me to-night?" said Mildred, suddenly coming back and holding out her piece of music. She spoke then like a spoiled beauty, with her head up and her eyes wide open; and she held out her music royally. This to show off before her enemies.

"Certainly—yes," said Mr. Kelly with wonderful vivacity.

Mildred smiled her triumphant smile, and then clouding down into nervousness and embarrassment

again, stumbled over her feet out of the room, her head bent quite into her twitching shoulders.

"Did you see her look at him?" whispered Mrs. Lyndon. "Did you ever see such presumption?"

"Never!" answered Miss Manvers; "her effrontery is quite frightful! What Mr. Kelly can see in her, I cannot imagine! Why, her nose is a mere snub, and she has no eyebrows!" Miss Manvers had a Grecian nose pointed at the end, and a pair of pencilled eyebrows; they were her own facial battle-horses and her essentials of beauty in others. She would have allowed neither Aspasia nor Venus herself any loveliness to speak of, if they had not had straight noses and narrow hair-lines above the eye.

Mr. Kelly took no notice of their whisperings, but lounged to the opposite sofa where he flung himself at full length, with his feet on the end cushion; as men do in boarding-houses—and, let us hope, nowhere else. And there he remained, with his eyes closed and his crossed ankles drumming against each other, until the bell rang for dinner.

As Mildred went downstairs, she met Henry Harley coming in from the Academy where he had been spending his morning. Henry was an amateur artist who drew lengthy figures with attenuated limbs and heads without any place for the brains; for his style was elegance rather than power, he used to say:—"a

disciple of Raphael, my dear sir, more than of Michael Angelo." He used to teach Mildred drawing—for love; and he made the most of the bargain; for he got more love than he gave knowledge by a vast deal, spending the hours assumed to be devoted to the study of shading and perspective in discussions not calculated to do a young girl any good.

"My little Mildred!" he cried, seizing her hands. He did something more, I believe; but I don't quite know what it was. Only it made Mildred blush, whatever it was. "I have been longing for you all this morning at the Academy; upon my word I have! Don't you believe me?" He spoke very quickly; not so much in the artist rollicking voice as in the manner of a man grown fine from original vulgarity, and now affecting superior fashions.

Mildred looked up—a different creature now from the girl who had stumbled over her toes in the drawing-room not a minute ago—different even from the one who had enacted the part of a society queen, when she handed Mr. Kelly the music and showed her superiors how five hundred a year was her slave and humble admirer. She had looked pretty then; but forced and conscious; while now she was quite beautiful in the sudden rush of love and self-abandonment that chased away the timidity from her face, like a noble song breaking through deep silence. She put her hand

frankly into his, and they went together into the dining-room—a grand place for boarding-house flirtations; being supposed to be the safest from intrusion.

"And have you thought of me, little Mildred?" said Mr. Henry Harley in the same off-hand way, twirling his hair just at the corner curls.

"A little," said Mildred quietly, creeping closer to him.

After some more sweet passages of the same kind as those already gone through, Mildred said she must go; "It was getting near dinner-time, and the servants would be coming in to lay the cloth." Mr. Harley, after a show of sorrow and persuasion, caught hold of her as she turned to leave the room and was kissing her when the servant opened the door—opening it full on Miss Mildred in the very fact of having an offer made by Mr. Harley. So at least was her version downstairs to cook, where they laughed over the matter together. Ann shut the door with praiseworthy discretion, and Mr. Harley made half a pirouette, and said —"Mildred, we were fairly caught then!"

Of course Ann told Mrs. Smith. And of course Mrs. Smith spoke to Mr. Harley, and asked him what he meant? and what were his intentions?

Mr. Henry Harley fidgeted about the fireplace, where he was standing when his landlady put him through his facings, like a stoker with St. Vitus's dance. Intentions? Mildred was, he said, a very nice girl—

odd, amusing, clever, and all that—but—a—he had, in short, no intentions. Then he hummed a few bars of "Non andrai," and stirred the fire furiously.

Tears came into Mrs. Smith's mild blue eyes. This would have been such a good match for Mildred, friendless, fatherless, penniless as she was; for though Mr. Harley was not so rich as Mr. Kelly by two hundred a year, yet a man of any income whatever is a good match for a dowerless girl. And it had been part of Mrs. Smith's hope in the future, that her child might meet with a partner, as she used to call it, among her boarders, and so be saved from the miseries of an uncertain and dependent position. Of course she would have preferred Mr. Kelly; but as she would have been well content with Mr. Harley, who was such a kind-hearted creature and such an elegant artist!—the blow of his denial was severe.

"I am sure, Mrs. Smith," continued Mr. Henry with considerable embarrassment and a guilty blinking of the eyes—"I am sure I was not aware your daughter did me the honour of caring more about me than about anybody else. I have laughed and flirted a little with her, of course—all men flirt with nice girls; and Mildred is a very nice girl—but I never thought of gaining her affections—upon my word, I didn't!"

"I hope not, Mr. Harley," said Mrs. Smith, wiping her eyes. "It is very unfortunate, I am sure, for there's Mr. Kelly——"

"Ah—yes!" cried Mr. Henry Harley, making as if he would poke the ribs of his respectable landlady, as she stood soft and solid before him, "Kelly's the man. Of course he is. All the house is talking of it. Of course—Kelly, Kelly. He *is* a catch, he is; and Miss Mildred had better make up to him. *I* have nothing, and should not dream of marrying a nice girl like that and not be able to keep her like a lady. I think *that*, if you like, the most dishonourable thing a man can do. However much I loved a girl, I wouldn't marry her unless I could keep her properly. No, Kelly's the man. He can afford the luxury of a wife—I can't!"

"But then, Mr. Harley, if you did not mean to marry Mildred, how was it that, as Ann said——" began Mrs. Smith, with a puzzled air.

"Servants are invariable fibbers," interrupted Mr. Harley. "Whatever Ann said, it was an untruth, be assured. There, now, I don't want to know what it was; but I tell you beforehand it was false."

"But, I think," urged Mrs. Smith faintly, after a moment's pause "for Mr. Kelly's sake, and Mildred's, Mr. Harley, I think you had better——"

"Go?" said Mr. Harley.

"Go," said Mrs. Smith; and she twirled her cap-string.

"That is a hard punishment," said Mr. Harley. "How have I deserved it?"

"No, no!—not a punishment."

"A precaution, then?"

"Perhaps, Mr. Harley." And the widow's blue eyes looked up from the ground, much as Mildred's would have done; and then looked stolidly down again.

But Mr. Harley would not admit that. He pleaded his cause with a vast deal of fervour, vowing that, if suffered to remain, it should be better for Mildred, for that he would treat her so judiciously, so tenderly, and yet so strictly, that insensibly her feelings would slide into the merest sisterly interest, so that she would be prepared to accept any other eligible offer which might come in her way. In fact, Mr. Henry Harley demonstrated to Mrs. Smith, in the clearest and most logical manner, that the best way to cure a girl of an unfortunate attachment was for her lover to remain in the same house with her, seeing her every day, constantly employed in friendly offices for her, such as teaching her drawing—figures of Cupids and Ariadnes and pretty little Psyches; reading poetry to her while she sketched; discussing with her matters of psychological interest; and so taming her feelings down to a sisterly attachment by tenderness and affection. And then in the end, he assured Mrs. Smith, Mildred would cease to love him and be the happy wife of some one else! It was quite affecting—this picture that he drew of the beneficent effects of his remaining always near her!

Mrs. Smith, being a guileless, innocent woman, believed him and consented to his arrangement; and told Mildred not to be silly, but to love Mr. Harley from henceforth as a brother. At which Mildred cried; and said she would.

Matters now went on oiled hinges; and every one was satisfied. Mr. Harley was glad not to be turned out of a comfortable house where he had it all his own way and a pretty girl to love him into the bargain; Mrs. Smith was glad not to lose a boarder; and Mildred was glad not to lose a lover. For, of course, they were still lovers—Mr. Harley taking no notice of her in public, but making up for his coldness in private, to Mildred's great bewilderment and the increase of her passion; she perhaps because of this secresy, loving her artistic reprobate more than if all had been confessed and commonplace. They managed their affairs so well however, that no one in the house—not even Ann—suspected Mildred Smith of loving Mr. Harley; still less did any one suspect Mr. Harley of making the most violent love to Mildred Smith whenever he was a moment alone with her—which moments he contrived should be pretty frequent.

Least of all did Mr. Kelly suspect that he had a rival; and that his rival was master of the situation.

What a strange life was Mildred's now! Openly slighted and sometimes insulted, by the ladies; dis-

owned by her lover in society to be so fervently indemnified in private; knowing that she had five hundred a year and expectations waiting for her acceptance, which, if she accepted, Mrs. Lyndon, the stockbroker's wife in difficulties, and Miss Manvers, of the good family and traditional beauty, would then be obliged to look up to her, yield her precedence, and be thankful to be patronized by her; her private life and her public standing in this boarding-house society so different one from the other;—her head was sometimes giddy with the various thoughts and feelings that used to rush so tumultuously through it! And as she thought of the position which he was merely waiting for an opportunity to offer her, Mildred would look up gratefully at Mr. Kelly with her sweet, dreamy eyes; at which that loose-limbed gentleman would knot himself up into an angular conglomeration of misfitting members, and feel almost as joyous as if he had found a new coinage of the time of Alfred.

Mr. Kelly, never very precipitate, at last made up his mind to write to Mildred. He had been a long time about it, but he was one of those queer men without impulse who find as much satisfaction in thoughts as they do in facts. And as he believed that Mildred loved him, belief was quite as good as knowledge. However, he did write at last, and make her an offer of his hand and heart, his present goods and

future expectations—concluding by expressing his conviction that she was an unique specimen of womanhood, and one that any man might be proud of possessing in his collection.

Mildred kept the letter for some days unanswered. It was such a triumph to hold in her hand the veritable offer which the ladies said she had manœuvred so hard to get—to hold it only to refuse! It was such a luxury to sacrifice this splendid position to her love. She could not better prove the intensity and singleness of her own faith in her double-dealing lover; and she gloried in her sacrifice as a martyr suffering for his creed.

She wrote to Mr. Kelly; kindly, gently, gratefully, coaxingly. But she said No. Mr. Kelly rubbed his eyes, winked, carried the letter into the sunlight, turned it round and about and inside out and upside down; and still could make out only the same startling words:—"thanks; sorrow; No."

Not a syllable more passed on the subject. All had been said that need be said, and Mildred was now left the only sufferer. The offer, with its rejection, was kept a profound secret from every one; from Mrs. Smith more carefully than from the rest; for if she had known that Mildred had refused such a magnificent settlement for love of Mr. Henry Harley, she would have banished that undesirable individual forthwith,

as indeed he deserved; and would so have cut off all Mildred's happiness at a blow. For, as is but natural, Mildred loved all the more because of the sacrifice her love had cost her—a sacrifice for which Mr. Henry Harley showed himself in no wise grateful, merely giving her a kiss and calling her a "regular little trump" when she told him.

But she had a bitter punishment to undergo. Mr. Kelly, in the midst of all his queer shambling ways, had the very pride of Lucifer in his heart, and the little girl's refusal roused it to the full. He was at first speechless with indignation and then angry; so he took to revenge, which he found a wonderful solace. And he performed his part to perfection. For there was not a petty spite, I grieve to say, in which he did not indulge; not a malicious expression, not an evidence of contempt, that he let pass, whether to be understood by the company at large or by Mildred alone. Every form and phase of disdain he showed her by turns; every kind of galling allusion he made spitefully and continually; Mildred sitting by with her shoulders twitching painfully and her large eyes raised with a kind of imploring wonder to his face. This secret persecution continued for a long time, the poor little girl growing paler and more nervous every day under it; Mr. Henry Harley cooling towards her too; till it became a melancholy thing

to witness the gradual fading of the poor child's life, and the patient despair with which she sat by the closing tomb of her happiness.

In the very blackest hour of her desolation Mr. Henry Harley went away. No tears, no prayers from Mildred, could keep him. He had fallen in love with a painting lady at another boarding-house, where he had been to visit a friend—for people who live in boarding-houses are a peculiar race, almost as exclusive and well-known among each other as the gipsies or the Jews—and Mr. Harley's artistic tastes were called in action;—he must go to study her effects. So he went, and none could stay him. And now poor Mildred was left alone; left to reflect on the past and perhaps to learn from disappointment that saddest scepticism of all—as to whether the sacrifice of worldly advantage to principle, of ambition to love, were a folly or a good. But she kept her faith in principle, and her pride and her secret as well; and no one knew that Mr. Kelly, who treated her now with such bitter contempt, had once asked her to become his wife and had punished her for refusing him.

Years rolled by, and still this strange girl kept faithful to her first love, who now had wholly deserted her: and still Mr. Kelly stayed on and on in the same dull boarding-house, as if for the one express purpose

of insulting the poor child with an endless ruthless punishment. Till at last Mildred could bear it no longer. Too timid to resent, she was too sensitive to endure this kind of life, which seemed to have no term to its sufferings. So one morning she quietly walked out of the house, leaving no address; and after a long time of silence and of fearful suspense to Mrs. Smith, she wrote to her, saying that she had entered a family as governess, and that she was going abroad next week. The reason why she had not written before, she said, was because she wished to be settled and well provided for, before she met her mother again. Her pride would not allow her to undertake a matter like this, to fail, or to have to depend on her friends for success.

"Ah, she was always a proud child!" sighed Mrs. Smith tenderly; "and none the worse for it!"

When Mr. Kelly heard where Mildred had gone and what she was doing, he paid his bill, packed up his effects and drove away into the fog. And if a clairvoyante had described what he was about, and how he looked that day when rattling through the streets of murky London, he would have been seen huddled up in a corner of the cab, sobbing like a child, and crying: "Mildred! Mildred! I have driven you to this!"

Perhaps I may have more to tell of poor Mildred Smith some day. And of Mr. Kelly too.

THE LAST TENANTS OF HANGMAN'S HOUSE.

THE LAST TENANTS OF HANGMAN'S HOUSE.

They came no one knew whence and they lived no one knew how; for though she was evidently a lady born and bred, and more delicate than most, yet they had no servant but Molly Hartland, the shock-headed "maid" of old Jose living in the mud cottage under the cliff; and she went only by chance times, and not for long together. She never stayed a night in the house, nor saw more of it than the kitchen where she did her "chores" in her rough way—and then left. Who or what they were was a mystery to the whole country side; and so far as things went at present, seemed likely to remain so. They had come quite suddenly one wild October night, and had taken possession of Hangman's House—a dilapidated old place which had got its name from one of its former possessors, who, suspected of treachery by his comrades, had been hunted like a rat, caught in the loft and his body left hanging on an improvised gallows out of

the window. Since then the place had earned but evil repute, now for smugglers, now for spectres—with darker tales of bewildered travellers or shipwrecked men who had been seen to go in but never to come out again—for all those terrible half-mythic crimes which are sure to centre in a long-disused house standing lone and desolate on a wild sea-coast.

These latest tenants had lived ever since their arrival, a year or so agone now, in the strictest seclusion; asking nothing of the neighbours but such food as was absolutely necessary, which was paid for by the lady herself and always at the time; with Molly Hartland to do such work as the lady was physically incapable of doing—Molly being the most ignorant and brutish of any creature born in woman's shape possible to be found, and therefore it might be supposed the least likely to carry tales. They had no visitors; they never received a letter; they called themselves Capstone; and were man and wife though they looked more like father and daughter. For he was a good twenty years older than she, and she seemed to have more fear of him than goes with wifely love of the right sort.

He was a tall, lean man, with sloping shoulders, a hatchet face, sucked-in leathery cheeks, and a large hooked nose like the beak of a bird of prey; his eyes were small and of a fiery red, sunk deep beneath heavy

brows, the coarse light hairs of which fell over them like the thatch of a pent-house; his thin lips were set into a perpetual smile, crueller than curses, and fuller of subtle warning than a sneer; his straw-coloured hair hung evenly all round from the centre of his head; and his long and bony hands had curved fingers and pointed nails, which, to carry the resemblance still further, were like the talons of a bird of prey. His manner, when by chance he spoke to any one, and always to his wife, was of exquisite politeness; but long before this Lilian had learned to dread his politeness more than his wrath. Indeed it was his wrath; for the more anger he felt the more suavity he showed and the more cruelty he practised.

For the wife herself, poor Lilian, she was doomed by nature to be a victim. With very little judgment and of varying mood—being sometimes timid to abjectness, at others bold to rashness—never seeing when to yield or when to oppose, and her opposition always ending in tears and obedience, she was all that such a man as her husband could desire in his creature. Her very changefulness of temper gave his tyranny the zest of a struggle; and served him as a kind of excuse, if he had wanted one, for his brutality when he conquered. And as all he needed was a creature, not a companion, he was well enough suited for the present with one whom he might use as he would, without fear of enduring resist-

ance; without fear either of unwelcome protection—for Lilian was an orphan, and her only brother had gone away to sea many years ago now, and had never since been heard of. So, if not dead, he was as good as dead; and as, for his own reasons, Mr. Capstone had covered up all traces of his removal to Cornwall, there was not much chance, if ever Fred should turn up again, of his finding his sister under another name and in such a God-forgotten place as Hangman's House, out by Michael's Run. Wherefore, the lean man with the hooked nose and the curved fingers wrought his will unchecked by the fear of God or the law of man.

Mr. Capstone had been about a year at Hangman's House, and the rough October weather had come round again, when a cry went up that a ship, caught between the two headlands, was drifting into the bay. The tide was running high and a strong west wind was blowing straight in shore. Black and Titanic rose the sharp and broken line of cliffs; long reefs, sunken, treacherous, ran far into the sea, appearing only at low water—at high, making unseen bars over which the sea foamed and flew; while every here and there huge rocks reared themselves up from the foam-like savage sentinels, barring all ingress into a bay as threatening, fierce and deadly as themselves. It was a coast where was no mercy for any wandering boat, no way of escape for any drowning man; it was

the cruellest bit in all that cruel line, and it had lost more lives than any other spot; it was the terror of every seaman who had to pass that way; and the current set so strong in shore that ships steered far out to sea, insomuch that a sail was scarcely ever seen on the horizon. When it was it was mostly for doom.

On came the ill-starred ship, blown right out of her course; her helm useless, her smaller spars gone, caught by the wind and the tide and driven madly in shore. Already some of her men, the captain among them, had been washed overboard; but some were still left, whom the watchers on the cliffs could see clinging to the rigging or lashed to the main-mast. The whole district had collected on the cliffs. The two coastguards nearest at hand, and the men who, but for them, would have been wreckers of the old stamp, women, children, all were there; some to save and some to spoil; and among them the lean, lank figure of the tenant of Hangman's House with his pale and pretty wife on his arm. The storms which beat on the coast were his pastimes, when he would wonder if her brother had perished in such a gale as this?—the brother of whom time and yearning thought had made an ideal, and who, if she could bring back to life, would be to her as a god under whose care she would never know sorrow or suffering again.

Holding then her hand on his arm, her attitude tender and affectionate, he every now and then stooped his face close to hers, saying at intervals: "And who knows, my dear, perhaps your brother went down on such a day as this. Let us fancy that man Fred. Do you see him? that man in the bows: 'pon my soul! not unlike your brother. Phew! he got a ducking then! and Lord, now he's gone, washed clean overboard, as clean as a ninepin! Poor Fred! Don't you see his brown head in the water there, bobbing up and down like a seal? Ah, well, you'll never see it again; he's done for. Now, my dear, if you scream or faint or play any of your tricks—you know the dog-whip with the red handle, don't you? I think you do. And you'll have cause to know it again, my love, if you don't stand steady."

All this while the ship came drifting on, plunging into the waves and rising out again with a shudder, like some creature in agony, flung from reef to reef as the waves lifted her and the wind carried her onward, till at last she came grinding on to the Lion rock in the centre of the bay. There was no lifeboat belonging to Michael's Run, and she could not have lived in such a sea if there had been one; but the coastguards fired a couple of rockets, one of which fell short and the other struck true. A tall man, who had been holding on gallantly, took the cord. He pushed aside a comrade

who seemed to dispute it, and the weaker fell into the sea, while the stronger lashed the cord round him, and gave the signal to pull on shore.

"Good," said Mr. Capstone applaudingly; "that fellow understands business."

The man had no sooner cleared the deck than the mainmast fell; and in less than two minutes after, the boat went to pieces like a toy puzzle, and only a mass of broken firewood showed where she had been. Not a man on board was saved, except the one who had seized the rope and lashed it round him; and he was hauled in, senseless, close to where the Capstones stood. He was a swarthy man in the prime of life; this was all that Lilian saw; when her husband, touching him lightly with his foot, turned to Molly Hartland, and said: "Here, Molly, the sea has brought you a lover. Take him to my house, you fellows; I'll have him."

"Be advised, sir," put in Molly's father, old Jem—the most notorious wrecker and smuggler of bygone times when brandy was drunk out of milk-pails, and Molly's mother gave the child sovereigns to play with on the cabin floor; "there's no good in taking a man into your house as is washed up from the sea.

> 'Save a stranger from the sea,
> And he'll turn your enemy.'

That's what we say hereaway, sir; and there's the story of Cruel Coppinger to bear us out."

But Mr. Capstone only laughed till his red eyes were nearly lost behind the straw-coloured thatch above them, as he answered, turning his back on Jem: "I'll dare the saying, my man. Here, fellows! haul him along to Hangman's House—we'll soon bring him to his senses again; and I'll give you a sovereign to drink his health and hurt your own."

The man now lying senseless on the ground was a magnificent fellow to look at; tall, dark, and powerfully built; with a face absolutely faultless for manly beauty, and yet a face at which women would involuntarily shudder and which no man would like to trust in the dark, and unarmed; a face which, speechless and lifeless as the man was, marked a nature at once desperate and resolute, bold, lawless and determined. He was not the kind of man of which a creature could be made, thought Lilian; what then did her husband want with him? She who knew the guilty secret of their lives, knew also the necessity of keeping prying eyes out of it. What could they do with a man like this castaway, admitted to partnership in the crimes that had to be hidden? Or was the guilt to be passed on to another? at once shared and multiplied?

Indifferent to the set look on his face, reckless of the consequences so sure to follow on her opposition, Lilian turned to her husband with a shuddering kind of appeal.

"Do not take this man into the house!" she said earnestly. "Hear me for once—do not."

"What, my love, after all my lessons?" said Mr. Capstone with a smile, taking her arm with a caressing gesture.

The pale fair woman shrunk, blenched and put up her left hand to wipe away the drops that started on her upper lip; but she said no more. When they turned away from the crowd no one saw the blood that trickled down her arm into her ungloved hand. At night, when she took off her gown, there were four sharp cuts where her husband had clasped her arm so affectionately, and dug his talons into her flesh.

He laughed when he saw them, as she lay fainting under the whip with the red handle.

"I don't think Mrs. Capstone will venture on another remark for some time to come;" he said to himself. "Dear! dear! what a pity it is she needs so much breaking in to make her steady!"

For such a turbulent-looking man, it was wonderful how easily this castaway slipped into his place in this dull cloistered life at Hangman's House. No schoolboy could have been more tractable or apparently more contented; and Mr. Capstone daily congratulated himself on the good luck which had cast up such an invaluable helper on Michael's Run. He was no common sailor with hard and horny hands; he was a Spanish artist

accustomed to engrave on metal; and he had some knowledge of chemicals and casting. And as Mr. Capstone could speak Spanish, and Lilian could not, nor could Manuel, as he called himself, speak English, he was thus no restraint on any one. The two men talked as they pleased without betraying to the woman what they wished to keep secret; and Mr. Capstone said what he would to Lilian, and threatened her with his polite air and affectionate smile, the presence of Manuel sitting there at the bench, engraving, being no check on him. Indeed, that presence seemed rather to incite him to a keener kind of cruelty, as giving the zest of an audience that could not condemn.

From the first Manuel superseded Lilian in the work which she had been accustomed to do for her husband. He knew what he was about, even better than Mr. Capstone himself; and thus was of more use than the nervous, uncertain and now mutinous and now hysterical little wife; and one day, when he had specially pleased his employer, Mr. Capstone turned round to Lilian sitting idly crouched over the fire, saying, with a smile—

"My love, I begin to find you insupportable. My ruffian here can do all that you did, and ten times more; and it irritates me to see your pale sickly face about and those idle hands doing nothing. I must find employment for my own, my dear, if yours are so useless, or—get rid of you altogether."

And when he said this, he bent his face down to hers, as if to kiss her, with an expression in his eyes that froze her very blood. She knew him to be capable of any crime. Would he, now that she was of no more use to him, do as he said, and get rid of her as a witness, a participator who might be inconvenient?

He was standing with his back to Manuel, and Lilian had turned her face towards him. Suddenly she saw the Spaniard's eyes fixed on her. As a rule he never looked at her; seemed to be hardly aware of her existence; save the most curt formality or politeness, took no notice of her; but now, when she caught his great black eyes fixed full and blazing upon her, she saw before her the chance of another peril almost worse than those already surrounding her. She would rather have read the deadliest hatred in those flaming eyes than what she did read. And so audaciously expressed, too! It was almost as if he had known what Mr. Capstone was saying, and had invited her to take refuge in his love against the persecution of her husband.

Frightened, trembling Lilian, making some kind of excuse, or what her husband took as a promise of amendment, rose and left the room; running downstairs into the kitchen which, until then, had been her own poor sanctuary, inviolate save when Molly Hartland came to do her "chores." She was standing

there by the fireplace, trembling, palpitating, confused yet, when the door quietly opened and Manuel stole in with a noiseless step. It was rare that Mr. Capstone left him a moment alone. Under one pretext or another, he kept him always by his side, having an idea that "fast bind safe find" was a good motto to go upon; leaving Manuel only the night-time in which to make explorations and plans.

Lilian's very heart stood still for terror when she saw who it was that thus stole into her darkness. He came up to her, swift, stealthy, noiseless as a panther, his dark eyes flaming, his bronzed face alive with passion; and when he was near her he caught her in his arms whispering: "My love! my love!" Her fair hair broke loose and fell in long, soft waves over her face and breast; he kissed her hair, and he kissed the pale face beneath, but with no respect in his tenderness —more as a master than a lover.

"I love you," he said, in perfectly good English. "I will protect you, for I will kill him, and then you shall be mine."

"Good heavens!" cried Lilian, shrinking from him; but he held her tight. "You are an Englishman!"

"I am nothing but the man who loves you," said Manuel, kissing her again; she would rather he had stabbed her.

"He must know!" she cried.

"If you betray me I will kill both him and you," said Manuel, in a hissing kind of whisper. "Don't be a fool, pretty Lilian; you are one, but I love you nevertheless. I have given you my secret; I know you can keep secrets; but, by all the saints in heaven, if you betray me you shall repent it! I love you, my pale Lily; but I am not so mad as to put my life in peril for you. If one of us has to go, it shall be you; but it shall be neither. Another kiss. Peste! You refuse? Then I will take it. Adios, little girl. You are mine, remember, and I will kill him for you; but, silence: else!" With a peculiar gesture, Manuel dropped her into a chair, and glided from the kitchen as noiselessly as he had entered it.

So now Lilian had a secret to keep from her husband, as she had his to keep from others.

The work went on: it went on well.

"That fool of a Spaniard is putting his neck into a fine noose," said Mr. Capstone to his wife, smiling to Manuel, as he took up his last plate and examined it microscopically; Manuel taking no heed of his words—why should he, when he did not understand them?—but quietly resting his head in his hand, while he looked at his employer patiently.

Still smiling, and in the same voice, Mr. Capstone continued in Spanish—

"My good Manuel, you are invaluable. You shall

share like my brother. You are my more than brother —friend!"

On which Manuel smiled too; sedately; and replied that if his preserver and benefactor were pleased, all was well.

"When I have got what I want from him," said Mr. Capstone in English, with the most affectionate look and accent towards the Spaniard, "I shall give him up to the police or get rid of him in some other way. He must be a fool to think I would trust him! I was saying, my friend," he went on in Spanish this time, "that you have been a very treasure to me, and that I can never be too grateful for the work you have done. Courage! a few days more, and it will be completed!"

"Good!" said Manuel quietly.

Lilian stood quivering in every limb. True, she loved neither of the men, but she feared for fear's sake if not for love's; and then she herself was so desperately involved on all sides; but worst of all by her knowledge of Manuel's secret and his cognizance of how much her husband was betraying him. What a nest of crime it all was! There was not one wholesome part in it.

What was going on in the house at night? Footsteps crept about the passages, and sometimes she thought she heard her own name whispered; strange sounds kept her heart beating with mad terror far into

the night. She had been sent up into the loft where the man had been hunted and hanged, and where she had to make the best of her lonely fears; lying there listening to sounds which she could not comprehend, and in her fear fancying more than she heard. Sometimes she woke to feel, rather than hear, a stealthy presence at her door. But the door was never opened, though often it seemed to be tried; consequently she never knew whether it was her husband or the Spaniard who was there. Only it was not likely to be the former, for it was locked on the outside, and he always took away the key.

After repeated trials, at last a perfect plate was produced. The imitation was not to be detected by the keenest expert living: for had not the clever thief and forger got some of the Bank paper? and was he not, therefore, master of the situation? His false gold too, was to the hair's-breadth of balance. To be sure, he could not counterfeit the ring; but, save the ring, all was right: and with the paper he could make play securely.

"And now," said Mr. Capstone, expanding his narrow chest, as the three were assembled round the fire on the evening of the day of success: "to leave this old rat's castle and enjoy life afresh!"

"Afresh!" said Lilian with a weak kind of scorn.

"Would you think it afresh if I were to efface my-

self, and give you up to this black-headed ruffian?" asked Mr. Capstone smiling, and putting his head on one side amiably.

"Hush! For God's sake do not say such things!" cried Lilian, turning paler than usual. Then she flushed to the very roots of her hair; and her husband looked at her curiously.

"He is a good-looking ruffian enough," he said blandly. "Shall I make you over to him?"

"I will leave the room if you talk so," said Lilian angrily; and she rose from her chair. But he laid his curved fingers on her arm.

"You will do nothing of the kind, my lady," he said. "You will wait as long as I choose and you shall hear what I choose. I begin to suspect you. Aha! Have you been looking over the fence, my lady—making eyes, hey? thinking of handsome ruffians o' nights? This must be seen to. You and he together—by the Lord, but you'll smart for it!"

"You are mad," said Lilian.

"And you bad, love? Ha, ha! that's another to the score. You were both a trifle inconvenient before; now you are something beyond. The score is running—upon my soul it is. No matter. I can pay it."

Lilian saw the Spaniard's face.

"Let me go," she said faintly. "Oh, God! let me go."

"My love, you are inconvenient," said her husband, pushing her down in her chair while he played with her long hair. "Sit where you are, and be good company. It is an auspicious time; let us celebrate it."

The black December night was sharp and keen. The moon had not yet risen and the sky was overcast with heavy clouds. Not a star shone above; not a light twinkled below; nor land nor sea nor heaven gave the faintest sign of life; only a cruel wind whistled through the crannies and blustered round the house —as fierce as on the day when Manuel was cast up from the sea.

"A glass of wine, for the good result of the day!" then said Mr. Capstone with sudden vivacity, rising and taking with his own hand glasses and a bottle from a locked cupboard in the room.

During all their late talk Manuel had been sitting in a lounging careless attitude, his legs stretched out, his hands folded in each other, his chin on his breast, apparently half asleep. The firelight flickered on his face, and Lilian saw just one narrow glittering line between his eyelids, which showed that he was awake and watching. Mr. Capstone was, for him, somewhat slow and clumsy at that cupboard. He drew the cork of the bottle; and they heard him drink and smack his lips.

"The primest port that was ever grown," he said,

enthusiastically. "Here, Manuel, rouse up, my friend, and drink to our joint fortune. There are but two glasses left."

"I won't drink to-night," said Manuel sleepily. "I am feverish."

"Tut, tut! such wine as this will drive both care and fever away," urged Mr. Capstone. "No fear of that," he added, in English.

"I tell you no," said the Spaniard doggedly. "You English can pour molten lead down your throats. You could drink the waters of Styx if you called it wine. But your vile stuff that you pay your guineas for is hateful to us who know what true wine is. Drink yourself, and let me be."

"As you wish, my friend; I would not press you against your will," said Mr. Capstone amiably. "That cursed dog, he shall repent this," he said to Lilian—looking kindly at Manuel, as if telling her what they had been saying together.

But Manuel took no notice. He still sat stretched out before the fire, looking three parts asleep and wholly indifferent.

Suddenly he roused himself.

"Let me drink," he said, holding out his hand.

Mr. Capstone gave him the wine with alacrity. "The finest grown," he repeated.

Manuel put it to his lips.

"Pah!" he said, disdainfully. "You call this wine? It is only fit for hogs." And he emptied it into the fireplace. "Now," he said, "you will let me sleep."

"Ill-mannered hound," said Mr. Capstone; "your tether is nearly out. Here, you pale wretch, drink this," to Lilian, with a smile. "It is too good to waste on such as you, but I am in a jolly humour to-night, and I will indulge you. That fool has done the trick, so I don't mind throwing away a glass of wine on you. 'Pon my soul, though, you are not worth it! Here! drink it, I say; and see if you cannot look more like a woman and less like a ghost than you do. Your white face makes me sick."

"It is you who made it white," retorted Lilian.

"My love, that red-handled whip!" was the only answer; and poor Lilian quivered into tears. "If you cry, my dear, I shall take you into the reformatory at once, where I saw a lovely large rat to-day, and lock you up without a candle. What a thousand pities it is that you will be so unruly, sweetheart! However, drink your wine, 'rosy wine,' first; and then we'll talk about it."

Was Manuel dreaming? As Lilian raised the glass to her lips, he started up, shouted something in Spanish, and flung out his arms, striking the glass which fell in fragments at his feet.

"Thousand pardons to the señora," he said, rubbing

his eyes. "By the saints, I was dreaming; and a pretty dream they sent me!"

"Don't mention it," said Mr. Capstone, quite amiably. "An accident, who can prevent that? The vile hound! —that goes down two to him. His score is really getting insupportably long, but I'll pay it off with interest. Well, my love, you have lost your wine; your lover's doing, not mine, remember. Never mind, you will sleep soundly enough without it. And I'll let you off that whip. And now to bed, and—don't wake."

Lilian rose without remonstrance.

"Kiss me," said Mr. Capstone. "It will give me a new sensation in the presence of your black-haired ruffian. Kiss me, Lily," very tenderly.

"No," said Lilian abruptly; "I will not."

The Spaniard was standing before the fire now, and she saw his hand move into his bosom and clutch at something.

"No? You'll wish you had before the night is out, Mrs. Capstone," with meaning.

"I wish I had never seen you and never kissed you in my life!" burst out Lilian. "I wish I had died before I had married you."

"Gently, gently, my love; you forget the consequences," said her husband in a soothing voice. "Don't be so impatient, dear. The ruffian's turn will come, perhaps."

Manuel, standing before the fire in a brown study, smiled and nodded to himself, soliloquizing. "Yes," he said to himself aloud. "By the saints! yes."

Lilian fled, while Mr. Capstone laughed; but as she turned she met the Spaniard's eyes — just one glance—but that one glance was enough, both for him and for her.

"Pretty little playful kid," said Mr. Capstone in Spanish, kissing his hand to her as she disappeared; but Manuel did not take up the ball. He only smiled in a quiet kind of amiable approval.

After she had gone the two men fell a-thinking. They were both silent, looking into the fire; both thinking the same thing, and meditating on the best way. At last Mr. Capstone, giving himself a shake as a dog might, reared up his lank, lean figure and looked about him.

"How strange it is," he said musingly, "the regret one feels when one has come to the last of a thing! Take now the last of this old rat's castle where I have enjoyed such a quiet time of love and happiness with my Lilian—the last night—it oppresses me! I have keen perceptions of beauty and I have enjoyed the beauty here."

"Where?" asked Manuel simply.

"On the cliffs. I have a mind to see the old place once more. What say you, my friend?"

"It's a wild night," said the Spaniard reluctantly. "Dark, is it not?"

"No, the moon is up now. The sea will look grand. Come."

"I don't see the delight," said Manuel, still reluctant.

Mr. Capstone laughed. "Afraid?" he said.

"Carambo, no! But you English are for weather as for wine; nothing is too strong for you. However, I'll come." He buttoned up his jacket, but left the middle buttons open, where he could thrust in his hand.

"Thanks; a minute," said Mr. Capstone, and he left the room.

As he left Manuel drew out a dagger and tried its point. "It will settle his business, I think," he muttered, grimly. But he kept a watchful eye on the door while he opened, with a false key, the desk where Mr. Capstone kept that roll of bank paper and the fine steel engraved plates.

Meanwhile the master, in his private room, looked at the chambers of his revolver for the second time to-day. They were all loaded; and there were six of them.

"If necessary, sufficient," was his comment. Then he went up to Lilian's garret door, which he locked, and put the key in his pocket, saying to himself: "The fool! meddling idiot! I wished to spare her, and he spoilt my plan. She will know now; and she might have been spared. And he, too. What a curse it is that

people will not do as they ought!" All of which he half said, half thought, as he was arranging a lighted candle in a staircase cupboard filled with tarred rope, shavings and the like. Then he went downstairs, humming an opera tune gaily.

"For our last walk!" he said airily.

"Yes, our last," repeated Manuel quietly.

They took the way of the cliffs right over the Gauger's Path, where once, it was said, Coppinger had got an over brave and zealous gauger in his boat, had laid his head on the gunwale and had deliberately chopped it off with a hatchet. It was a wild place, where the cliffs had split asunder, leaving a chasm as clean and black and smooth as if it had been cut by a knife. By this time the wind had fallen and the moon had come out, so that the chasm yawning at their feet was distinctly visible. The two men walked in an even line together, each careful not to give the other half a foot's pace in advance. Manuel was to the right, and had taken Mr. Capstone's arm, thus leaving his own right arm free, the hand thrust into his breast. But then he had only a dagger, and the other might use a revolver with his left hand to advantage.

"Peste!" cried Mr. Capstone, stopping suddenly on the very edge of the chasm, and hastily withdrawing his arm.

In an instant Manuel had swung him a few steps

backwards, and in doing so faced him, and faced Hangman's House. Flames were creeping out of the windows, and the smoke was rising in dense clouds.

"Wretch!" he cried in English; "you have set fire to the house and left her to be burnt alive!"

"What! a traitor!" exclaimed Mr. Capstone, reeling back, and raising his hand.

The moonlight shone on the barrel of a pistol; there was a click, a flash, a report, and the ball grazed the Spaniard's cheek; but before he could fire a second time Manuel had leaped upon him, borne him to the earth and buried his knife to the hilt in his side.

"And you thought you were deceiving me?" he hissed, as he knelt on the dying man. "You thought you were making a tool of me?—getting my neck in a noose? ha! while your own was to go free. Miserable dog! it is I—the black-haired ruffian—who used you! I who have been master throughout—who will have your wife and your money, and who, up to this last moment, when you thought to throw me down that pit where I will throw you, have played with you and foiled you!"

"Mercy, mercy!" sobbed the dying man. "My good Manuel, mercy, dear friend—pity!"

"The same mercy that you have had on her!" said the Spaniard between his teeth.

He raised himself from the bleeding body, met the

glassy eyes as they were fixed on him with the yearning look of death and despair; then, laughing harshly, he kicked him over where he lay, and flung him down the chasm. He heard the heavy fall of the body as it struck against the smooth sides; then a splash in the sea; and all was still.

Swift as an Indian he ran back to the house, just as Lilian appeared at the window in her white gown, her fair hair streaming over her shoulders; looking, in the moonlight, of ineffable loveliness—more like an angel than a woman. The sight of her burnt the Spaniard's heart and convulsed it with pain. What if he could not save her! He *must* save her; he would; he had vowed that she should be his, and he would keep his vow though the very elements opposed! He rushed into the house and through the stifling smoke; braving the creeping tongues of flame that were licking up the wall. He came to her door, which the fire had not yet touched. It had not been for nought that Lilian had heard those stealthy footsteps at night —had been conscious of his presence. The Spaniard had employed his hours well; and before she had time to realize that it was he whom she had seen crossing the grass in the moonlight, her garret door was flung open, and Manuel, blackened with smoke and crimsoned with blood, had seized her in his arms.

"Now you are mine!" he said; "I have killed him."

"Heaven protect me!" cried Lilian, covering her eyes with her hands.

"I am better than Heaven," said Manuel; "and I will protect you." He kissed her passionately. "Lilian! Lilian! say that you love me!" he cried. "By the saints, if you do not, I will fling you into the flames and let you perish!"

He lifted her up in his arms, and hers fell round his neck as her hair fell over his face.

"Yes, I love you," she said; and fainted.

Manuel could never tell how he got out of the burning house with that lifeless woman in his arms. It seemed to him as if nothing could have hurt him; as, through smoke and fire, he bore the pale fair woman he loved, and laid her on the grass in the quiet moonlight. But when he flung himself down by her, and took her head on his knee, and called to her to look up and thank him by her love for her life, it was the howl of a wild beast more than the cry of a man which burst from his lips when he found that she was dead.

When the neighbourhood was roused, as at last it was, by the news that Hangman's House was all ablaze, they came upon a strange sight. On the grass, some little distance from the house, evidently placed there by human care, her long rich silky hair spread smoothly out, her hands laid tenderly across her breast and a pale December rose placed within them, lay poor

Lilian, where the flames could not touch her nor the falling rafters strike her. Not a trace of the master nor yet of the stranger was to be found; only the dead body of the woman without a mark upon her to show how she died. But while they were all yet full of wonder at what had become of the men, washed up by the tide the lank, lean figure of the one whom they had known as Mr. Capstone, of Hangman's House, drifted on shore, with a gaping knife-wound in his side.

Not long ago after this there flashed into London society a stranger, rich, handsome, reckless, who seemed to have come from the clouds; but from a golden cloud; a stranger whom mothers courted for their daughters, and to whom fathers and brothers gave their honest hands; a stranger who could speak many languages, who was an accomplished artist and who had travelled to all parts of the world; but who, when any one by chance spoke of Cornwall, and asked him if he knew that coast, used to aver with some warmth that he did not and had no wish to know it.

And again, not long ago, a man who might have been that stranger's twin brother, was to be seen at Toulon, wearing the bullet and the chain, under sentence of hard labour for twenty years, for a homicide which he had not committed. But in his indictment of crimes done on French soil, no mention

was made of a body which was washed ashore near Michael's Run in Cornwall, with a knife-wound in the side; of the fair-haired woman laid on the grass near the burning ruins of Hangman's House; nor of the forged bank-notes by which that brief and brilliant season of London splendour and Parisian gaiety was maintained. And the man, being a philosopher in his way, used to smile to himself as he pondered on the difference there is between the things which are known and punished in the life of a man, and the things which are concealed and bear no harvest of sorrow or of shame;—and how the latter are so frequently the worse of the two!

DEAR DAVIE.

DEAR DAVIE.

I know it is the fashion to call servants selfish and mercenary, and to make out that they have all the faults common to humanity in excess of every one else; but we had an old servant whom I do not think any one would have disliked; at least I used to think so, until we had bitter proof of the contrary. He was the last of a long race of retainers in our family; for the Moffats had been servants at the Hall for three generations; and old David, or "dear Davie," as we used to call him, was as much a part of our family as one of ourselves. He had come in when a mere boy as a kind of general helper; rising by the orthodox stages, till he had grown to be head man of everything; nominally butler, but in substance intendant, *maître d'hôtel*, manhousekeeper, "acting lieutenant under a very easy-going captain," as poor papa used to say.

He was an old man now; past seventy; and I dare say he did cling to his place and privileges with perhaps at times uncomfortable tenacity. But who would

have had the heart to take them from him? Our father, a kind-hearted, good-natured man, let him have his own way; and what he thought right to do, of course we thought right to imitate. He and Davie had been boys together; or rather Davie had been a young man when he was a boy: and had taught him all that boys like to learn of rural life and sports; so that he always remembered this, and never quite got over the feeling of Davie's superior wisdom on certain points. My two brothers also were very fond of him; so were we girls; and he of us. And then he was the best creature in the world.

Dear Davie! I think I see him now, with his tall, thin, square-cut figure just beginning to be a little bowed at the shoulders; those flat angular shoulders from which his clothes hung as if from two pegs; his fine white head and mild blue eyes, and that nice manner of his, which was such a pleasant mixture of familiarity, affection and respect. All our troubles were Davie's, as were all our pleasures. When Norah married so well, Davie was quite as miserable and proud and happy as any of us; and when Charlie went to India, nine years ago, the dear old man cried as openly as both Lucy and I did; and he was almost as glad when we used to get his letters. Indeed, Charlie, the youngest of us all, had perhaps been his favourite of the two brothers; if he could be said to

have liked one best when he loved both so well. And when that terrible sorrow came upon us, and we lost first papa and then Reginald, both in the same year, I am sure Davie was like another father to Lucy and me, he was so kind and tender and faithful.

Since Charlie had been in India he had married. Of course we had not seen his wife yet; but now that our darling Reginald had gone—our eldest, our pride and stay—Charlie was the heir, and had to come home with his wife and children—there were two, both boys—and take possession of the Hall. You must not think that Lucy and I thought only of ourselves in all this sorrow if I tell you that, beside being so unutterably miserable, we were also uneasy and uncomfortable. The family tradition of the Lombes had always been one of close union. We had been a notoriously united set of people for generations; perhaps too much so; and there had never been a question of right or sufferance to the old home among the unmarried women. Papa's two sisters had lived with us till they died; and here were Lucy and I in the same condition with respect to Charlie. But somehow we doubted Kate, Charlie's wife; and we had an idea that she would not like the arrangement so much as dear mamma had done. All her letters to us had been strangely cold. I cannot tell you how it was they struck us so unfavourably, but they did; more I imagine by what they did not

say than by what they did. She never signed herself our sister; never called Charlie anything but "my husband" or "your brother;" always wrote of poor papa as "Mr. Lombe;" of Regy as "Mr. Reginald," or "your elder brother;" and, after papa's death, she called him "Mr. Lombe" in the only letter she wrote to us; and, in fact, the whole tone was stiff, reserved and unfriendly. However, she was now to be mistress of the old house—dear, handsome, generous Reginald, ah! what a loss that was!—and Charlie and she were coming over by the next mail.

As for Charlie, of course we had no doubt of him. He was a Lombe; a true Lombe; but all the same his wife might make it a little unpleasant for us if she chose, especially as we had been mistresses of the place so long: at least Lucy had. For even I was beyond thirty; and our mother had died when Charlie was born; so that for more than twenty years Lucy had had the command, and we could scarcely understand anything else. We had lived too, in the real old-fashioned English way, seldom leaving home and taking a personal interest in all that went on in the village and estate. So that we had plenty of occupation and a not very narrow sphere of action and influence. But Kate, Charlie's wife, was to be mistress now. Lucy and I often wondered how we should get on with her and what she would leave in our hands.

Ah! can I ever forget that day? Lucy and I were sitting in the drawing-room after dinner, very sad, very broken, speculating on the time when we might expect to see Charlie and his wife and trying to drown our vague fears of her in our joy at having our brother with us again. We made out that they would be at Marseilles about now; and that it would not be long—say a week—before they would be at home. While we were sitting there talking, we saw a horseman come at full speed up the avenue; then a noisy ring tore at the hall bell; and soon after Davie came hurrying into the room with a telegram. Telegrams were not so common then as they are now, and they had never been usual at the Hall, where indeed they were specially dreaded. Davie looked frightened; we girls trembled; and then Lucy, opening the cover, read just these words from Kate: "Your brother died at sea a fortnight ago. Prepare for my arrival at the Hall in a few days."

Telegrams cannot be sympathetic, I know, but this read to us so cruel, so heartless and unfeeling! It came so abruptly. The news was so crushing, so awful! Oh! words fail me. I cannot express what it was to us. Charlie dead! the last of our house! Father and two brothers all gone in less than a year. We had scarcely recovered from the shock of poor papa's death, when Reginald was taken from us; and now Charlie, the last of the generation; and poor Lucy and I left

alone. Alone, with a stranger to come and take possession of the old house, and to bring up in ways different from ours the future master of the Hall, the future representative of the Lombes. Cannot you understand all the different waves of sorrow that overwhelmed us? Grief at the loss of our only brother, family pride and old-time conservatism, our utter loneliness and the vague fear and antagonism existing between us and Kate. All these smaller feelings helped to swell the current; though the fact that Charlie was dead, and that we should never see him again, was the most terrible sorrow of all.

Well, we did not go mad, nor break down into illness, we lived through the next few days in a kind of crushed despair; feeling something, I fancy, as criminals must feel before their trial, not knowing what was to be our fate. And in a few days Kate arrived. She sent no further intimation. We did not know where to write to her; and all that we had to do was, as she said, to prepare for her coming.

It was just a week after that dreadful telegram, and it was early in the day; I remember the very hour—exactly twenty minutes past one; a fine bright summer day—when three hack-flies drove through the gates and up the avenue. They were loaded with trunks and packages of all kinds; on the outside of the first was a native servant in his Eastern dress, on the last an

English servant in livery—but a different livery from ours. Ours was the old murrey colour and gold; this was olive and silver. The servants flocked into the hall; and we went to the door to meet our sister Naturally, at least it seemed natural to us, dear Davie stood out on the step with us. He was so like one of our family that neither Lucy nor I thought, for a moment, whether it would look odd or not to a stranger that he should be standing on a level with ourselves, and occasionally speaking to us with the affectionate familiarity of a poor kind of uncle.

In the first fly was Kate alone. She was very pretty; and her jaunty, fresh, coquettish weeds set her off immensely. She was a small, round kind of woman, with large light eyes that looked as if there had never been a tear in them—those dry, glittering eyes, like polished stones or metal, with narrow upper lids and a trick of staring steadily, as if nothing could lower or abash them; the mouth was thin but prettily curved, and the nose was small but prominent. It was a face that ended in the tip of the nose—don't you know what I mean?—with the forehead and chin sloping backwards; but though it was decidedly a pretty it was not a pleasant face. It was fair, and the colours were pure and the outlines rounded; but it was a face that had neither tenderness nor sympathy in it; it was as hard in its expression as if cut out of wood.

She got out of the fly deliberately, and shook hands with us in a quiet matter-of-fact way, drawing back as Lucy bent to kiss her. I took the hint and did not offer. And, looking at us full in our faces, she said, in a slow, monotonous voice: "You are Miss Lombe, I presume?" to Lucy; to me: "And you are Miss Mary?"

She stared with cold surprise at Davie who had come forward in his kind old-fashioned way, half offering his hand; and that was her sole acknowledgment of him; and then she turned round and spoke to the servant sharply in Hindostanee, while he stood bowing and salaaming in a way that seemed quite shocking to Lucy and me, accustomed to treat English servants with respect, and to be treated by them with independence.

In a few moments however, the second fly drove up, in which were a black nurse and two children. The dear children! You can fancy how Lucy and I yearned towards them! Poor Charlie's boys! and the last of the Lombes! The black man, a little rudely I thought, thrust himself before old Davie and opened the door of the fly, and we ran up and held out our arms to them; but the younger began to scream and hid his face in the ayah's neck, and the other made naughty faces and called out to us in Hindostanee to go away, and that we were pigs and ugly old women. So we learnt afterwards. Kate laughed, and said: "Cheep, cheep;"

the ayah smiled and looked on helplessly, and, oh, dear! it was a dreadful meeting! Kate so cold and indifferent, the strange servants, the reluctant children, and poor Charlie only so lately dead!

Lucy and I, with tears in our eyes and that dreadful spasm at our hearts, led the way into the house; when Kate, stopping in the hall, asked abruptly, looking at the servants generally but not acknowledging their curtsies: "Which of you women is the cook?" just as if she had been speaking to people at an inn. Jane Clewer came forward and curtsied. She had lived with us fifteen years, and was a great favourite with us all.

"Can you cook well?" asked Kate.

Jane smiled nervously, coloured and curtsied again. "I believe I know my business, ma'am," she answered.

"So you all say," said Kate, in such an odd, bloodless kind of way! "However, I shall soon be able to judge if you will suit me or not. Prepare tiffin—luncheon I mean—at once, if you please, and take care that the rice is properly boiled. Saïd will show you how to boil it, as you will not know. English servants never do."

Then she spoke to the servant in Hindostanee, while poor Jane got scarlet and looked at us, scarcely knowing whether to blaze out on the spot or take her humiliation quietly. But I felt for the poor thing, with all her English ways and prejudices, having a black man —a heathen—set over her in her own kitchen, and to

teach her such an elementary thing as how to boil rice! However, there was no help for it; so they all filed out of the hall again, and Saïd, salaaming, followed them, while little Regy, the eldest boy, pulled the tail of our Persian cat till she cried; and the younger one ran screaming after the peacock which we had just begun to tame, and frightened it away over the lawn into the shrubbery.

"Now you must show me the house," said Kate, turning to Lucy. "We shall have time before tiffin is ready, and then I shall know where I am and what to arrange."

So we understood it all now. Of course we expected her to be mistress; but we thought she would have allowed us to resign our authority, instead of taking it out of our hands. Don't you know the difference? Well! I need not go into this. I give you just that little opening sketch as an indication to all that followed. Before Kate had been an hour in the house she was fully installed; and had even asked for the keys, saying, in her quiet manner: "I must ask you to label these for me, Miss Lombe, till I have learnt which is which;" and making Lucy and me feel only guests in our old house. She took the head of the table, and asked Lucy "to be kind enough to take the foot;" she assigned the children their places, and made her two men, Saïd and Ross, of more importance

than Davie whom, indeed she ordered about and spoke to as he had never been spoken to in his life. She said very little to us, but talked to the little boys and her Indian servants, always in Hindostanee; and altogether she made herself as utterly unpleasant as it was possible for her to do. And yet we could say nothing. You cannot very well complain of people for that intangible kind of rudeness which only wounds you but does not strike you openly.

We found out afterwards that she had made up her mind to this course of action from the first. She thought we might be difficult to move by gentler means; that we were old maids who had grown into the soil, as it were, so she determined on uprooting us at once. According to her view of things it was the most merciful way. I do not mean to deny that we should have liked a little fuss over our abdication; we should; we should have liked to give up our authority generously, with a little scene, a little effusion; we should have liked the importance of teaching her our ways and of training her to follow in the Lombe footsteps. That was very natural, for we *were* old maids; thin, home-staying, fixed in thought and habit; but we were not, I think, unjust or bad-hearted, and we wished to do what was right by Charlie's wife and children. Still we were Lombes. The house had been ours for all our lives; and the family traditions

were strong, as I told you. Perhaps it was equally natural;—Kate's unconditional assumption of authority without any reference to us, and our desire to make ourselves of importance by giving up gracefully, as of our own free will, what she took as her right.

Of course the servants were the chief trouble. Kate did not get on with any of ours, and Ross, her footman, was given all the functions of the butler if Davie retained the name. Lucy and I had an utter horror of this man Ross. He was a bold, showy, impudent fellow, who treated us all, even Lucy and me, in the most free and easy manner possible—and with covert disrespect, as if we knew nothing beyond crows' nests and butter-milk. Davie frankly hated the man; but Kate upheld him; and between him and Saïd our poor old friend's life was by no means a pleasant one at this moment. Nothing but his affection for us kept him to his post; but, as he used to say, his eyes filling with tears: "I mistrust them, young ladies, and I will not leave you, dear children, in their power." Dear Davie! we were always "young ladies" and "dear children" to him! And indeed both Lucy and I had a vague mistrust of the new men; but perhaps that was because we were such thorough old maids, and so disinclined to anything new!

Kate had been at the Hall about a fortnight, when one day all the servants were called up into the

dining-room; and, without any previous warning, all received notice to leave this day month.

"I have no fault to find with you," said Kate, in her quiet, monotonous way; "and you will all have excellent characters; but you have been too long in the place, you are too familiar with your former mistresses, and there is too much gossip and secret caballing going on. As I dismiss you all, I single out none; but I must be mistress in my own house, and do what I like without the remarks that are made now. So, for all our sakes, every one of you must find another situation."

You may imagine how this took us all by surprise. Some of the maids fell to crying. Jane Clewer was one; and Davie, dear Davie! I thought the old man would have fainted. He staggered back as if he had been struck, and I ran up to him and put a chair for him.

"Not Davie, Kate," cried Lucy, putting her hand on his shoulder; "Davie is one of our own family, poor papa's friend and Charlie's—of all of us. Davie must not go; Charlie would never have let him go."

"And old Moffat with the rest," said Kate coldly. She never got excited. "He is past his work and very troublesome; and I should think, with his long service and absurdly extravagant wages, he must have saved a fortune by now—certainly quite enough to live on.

Besides, I wish a younger man at the head of the establishment." She meant Ross.

"Then if Davie goes, Mary and I will go too," said Lucy excitedly.

Kate bowed. "That is quite for yourselves to decide," she said. "If you choose to stay here I will not turn you out; if you wish to go I will do nothing to keep you against your will. You must act just as you think best."

"We will leave," said Lucy again. "Mary, don't you say too?"

"Leave, yes! without a moment's hesitation," I answered. "If we do not go of our free will we shall be forced to go before long. This is meant for us."

"You are wrong there," said Kate; "I would not have forced you. If you like to leave because I wish to change the servants"—here she lifted her shoulders and spread out her hands—"you are your own mistresses," she added with a smile full of meaning. "But do you think it well to discuss these delicate matters before the domestics?"

"They are our friends!" I cried warmly. "The only friends we have in the house."

"I do not envy your choice," returned Kate; and, with a mocking bow: "I beg to leave you to your select associates;" she said, and swept out of the room.

Of course all this was very dreadful. That we should

have to leave our dear old home was bad enough; but that we, the Lombes, should have to confess to family jars, to be the cause of public talk and public scandal, was worse than all. You can imagine what it must have been to prim—I dare say we were prim—and in a manner proud, old maids, who had given the tone to society for so long, who had been the models of home affections and family loyalty for generations. But it must be done. We knew that this dismissal of our old servants, specially of Davie, the change of living, the change of style altogether, were so many blows aimed at us; and for self-respect we felt that we must withdraw from further suffering.

There was a small house about two miles off that we had always liked. It was just on the borders of Calne Wood, in a lovely situation; and the very thing for Lucy and me. For we were not rich. Our portions were small, in consideration of our being at home; but we were proud enough to resolve that what we had should be sufficient. We were to take Jane Clewer and Davie with us. But the dear old man would not hear of such a thing as "wages." He said that Mrs. Charles was right there, he had saved enough to keep himself for life and he would not take a penny from us.

"I know what you have, young ladies," he said, "five hundred a year between you; and you'll find

that a tight fit after the Hall. Jane there can take her wages, she is young yet (she was nearly fifty) and must think of her old age; and you'll have to have a man for the garden and the boots and shoes, and all that; but I'll be your man without wage, so no more need be said about it."

Was not that being good? No wonder we called him dear Davie! And really, servant though he was, we felt no degradation in the arrangement. We would not have taken a shilling from Kate; but dear Davie was our own—and she was a stranger!

I cannot understand what I am going to tell you now. How it all came about, what it all meant, I do not know and can only conjecture; but the story is a true one, if confused and unintelligible.

It was the night before Lucy and I were to leave the hall. There had been a rather warm dispute with Kate about some old silver which had belonged to our mother, and which Lucy and I thought we ought to have had; a silver tea service, candelabra, side dishes, etc. And as the Lombe family silver was rich and abundant, this, which was never used and which we had always looked on as belonging to us by right, would not have been missed. But Kate, in her character of trustee for her children as she used to say, would not part with a single piece. Everything in the Hall had devolved on them, she said, with her

immovable air; and she had not the power, if the inclination, to give us anything whatsoever. There had been sharp words about this silver, and Davie had upheld us, and Ross had heard the dispute; and then Kate ordered that special chest to be placed in her own room as if we were thieves!

It was in the middle of the night when we were all aroused by a hideous noise. Breaking up our sleep we could not tell what it was; but it was a dreadful mixture of groans and screams coming from Kate's room. Lucy and I, who slept in adjoining rooms, threw on our dressing-gowns and ran across the corridor to the blue room where Kate slept. Many of the servants were up and clustered on the landing: the younger women shrieking vaguely, and the ayah making a shrill unearthly noise like nothing I had ever heard before; and with all this, groans and half-stifled screams came from Kate's room, and the dogs were barking furiously.

We rushed into the room; and here I can scarcely tell you what we saw. Everything was in a dreadful state! The silver, about which there had been so much dispute, was strewed about the floor; there had evidently been a tremendous struggle, for chairs and tables were knocked down and the bed-curtains were torn; on the bed lay Kate, with a handkerchief round her neck and mouth, nearly strangled; on the floor

was Davie, pale and covered with blood—he had been stabbed. But he was not dead, only insensible and dying. The bedroom window was wide open, and Ross was nowhere to be seen. All the other servants were there; our own, and Saïd, and the ayah; but the new man was not to be seen. Davie could tell us nothing, neither what he was doing in Kate's room, nor what was the meaning of the struggle, nor yet who had stabbed him. Kate would not speak; all she would say was: "It was not Moffat who came to rob me."

But the next day, when the local inspector came to the house to inquire into matters, and when, immediately after him, a detective arrived from London with a warrant for the apprehension of John Hard, *alias* Ross, for robbery and all sorts of crimes, the mystery seemed to make itself clear to these men at all events. It was evidently a robbery, they said, planned before his flight. He had probably received a hint that he had been tracked; and the servants said they noticed how long he was talking to a beggar woman in the garden late in the evening, and that he had said he thought he "would make a good thing of it, and bolt."

As for the old man—and here they looked as if they could see further into dear Davie's character than we could, who had known him all our lives—if indeed he were quite incapable of having a hand in the robbery, he had probably heard something which had roused his suspicions, and had gone to see what it meant.

To which Kate said to me, quite earnestly: "I should think that must have been the case. I do not for a moment believe that Moffat had any hand in the intended robbery."

"If you had said that he had, Kate, you would have deserved to have been strangled outright, instead of being saved by him at the sacrifice of his own life!" said I, bursting into a passion of tears like nothing I have ever known before or since.

From this time Kate entirely changed. The dreadful scene she had gone through and the danger she had run, seemed to have shaken her nerves so that she could not steady herself. She was continually in hysterics and would not be left alone for a moment. She clung to us as if we had been her real sisters, and became as nice and good as she had been unfriendly before. But we had lost our Davie, our friend, our protector in her service! We had bought her at a heavy cost, dear Charlie's wife though she was. So the quarrel was made up over our faithful servant's grave; and we remained at the old Hall, as the Lombes should. And the boys are growing up dear loves and great beauties, and do not now call us pigs or ugly old women. Dear Davie! dear old man! It was through him, after all, that we got back our home. Heaven rest his soul! God reward his sacrifice!

THE FAMILY AT FENHOUSE.

THE FAMILY AT FENHOUSE.

I was to be a governess; but I could not obtain a situation. My poor mother had been insane for many years before her death; one of my brothers was deaf and dumb, another was deformed, while none of us showed health or vigour. In a word, there was no escaping the fact that we had the seeds of some terrible disease sown thickly among us, and that, as a family, we were unhealthy and unsafe. I was the eldest and the strongest, both in mind and body, but that was not saying much. I was always what I am now, tall and gaunt, with the spasmodic affection which you see in my face; as nervous as I am now and nearly as thin; short-sighted, which made my manners doubly awkward, and they would always have been awkward from my nervousness and ungainly figure; and with an unnaturally acute hearing, often followed by attacks of unconsciousness, which sometimes lasted many hours and rendered me, for the time, dead to all outward life.

Unpromising as our family condition was, when my father died and left us destitute, it was absolutely necessary that those of us at all capable should get something to do, and that the rest should be cared for by charity. The last we found more easy to be accomplished than the first. Many kind hands were stretched out to help the helpless of us, but few to strengthen the weak. However, after a time, they were all settled in some way or other, at least secured from starvation, while I, who had been considered the most hopeful, was still unprovided for, looking vainly for a situation either as governess or companion. Each was equally difficult to procure. On the one side my manners and appearance were against me, on the other, my family history. As I could not deny my inheritance of disease and insanity, mothers, naturally enough, would not trust me with their children; and I was not sufficiently attractive for a companion. People who can afford companions want something pliant, bright, animated, pleasant. No one would look at my unlovely face, or hear the harsh tones of my voice—I know how harsh they are—and pay me to be an ornament or pleasure to their lives. So, as I tell you, I was refused by every one; until I began to despair of success, and without blaming any, to understand that the world was too hard for me and that I had no portion in it.

As my last venture, I answered an advertisement in the *Times* for a companion to a lady in delicate health, living in the country. My letter was replied to in a bold, manly hand, and a meeting arranged. I was to go down that next day by train to a place about twenty miles from London, and find my way from a certain railway station named—conveyances not to be had—two miles across country to a village called Fenhouse Green. A mile farther would bring me to Fenhouse itself, "the seat of Mr. and Mrs. Brand." The note was couched in a curiously sharp, peremptory style; and pompously worded. I remember too, that it was written on a broad sheet of coarse letter-paper, and sealed with what looked at first sight to be a large coat of arms, but which, when examined, proved to be only a make-believe. With my habit of making up histories out of every incident that came before me, I decided that the writer was a military man, wealthy and high-born; and that, about to leave on foreign service, he wished to place his young and beautiful wife in careful hands so as to ensure her pleasant companionship during his absence. I made quite a romance out of that peremptory letter with its broad margin and imposing seal.

"They will never take me when they have seen me!" I sighed, as I settled myself in the third-class carriage which I shared with three soldiers' wives and

a couple of Irish labourers; and I wished that I could have exchanged my fate and person with the meanest among them. Though they were poor they were not under a curse, as I was; though man had not uplifted them, Fortune had not crushed them as she had crushed me. I was weeping bitterly behind my veil, overpowered with my own sadness and despair and almost decided on not going farther to meet only with fresh disappointment, when the train stopped at my station, and I let myself drift down the tide of circumstance, and once more dared my chance.

Asking my way to Fenhouse Green, much to the astonishment of the solitary station-master, I struck into a rugged by-road, which he said would take me there. The two miles' walk seemed as if it would never end. The road was lonely and the country desolate, ugly and monotonous—nothing but a broad ragged waste, without a tree or an autumn flower to break the dead dreariness of the scene. I did not meet a living creature until I came to an unwholesome-looking collection of cottages, covered with foul eruptions of fungi and mildew starting out like leprosy on the walls. Where the village green should have been, was a swamp, matted with confervæ. It was a place to remember in one's dreams, from the neglect and desolation, the hopeless poverty and feverish squalor of all about.

If this was the village of which the writer had spoken so pompously as his property, and of which I had imagined all that was charming and picturesque, it did not argue much for what had to come; and I began to feel that I had painted too brightly, and perhaps had ranked my chance too low. The place frightened me. I went through, glad to escape the stupid wonder of the pallid women and children who came crowding to the doors, as though a stranger were a rare and not too welcome sight among them. Indeed, some seemed to have a kind of warning terror in their looks when they pointed in the direction of the House, as they called it; and one old witch, lifting her stick, cried: "Surely, surely, not there belike!" in a tone which froze my blood. However, it was too late now to recede; so, full of an indescribable terror, I went on my way, until I arrived at Fenhouse where my future was to lie.

It was a lonely house, standing back from the road; completely concealed, in front, by a tangled shrubbery, while at the rear stretched a close dark wood with a trailing undergrowth of briars and thorns. The gate hung broken, supported by one hinge only; the garden was a mass of weeds and rubbish; the flower-beds were overgrown with grass and nettles; and what had once been pretty rose-trees and flowering shrubs were stifled by bindweed and coarser growths. The house

was of moderate size, two-storied and roomy; but so neglected and uncared for that it looked more desolate than anything I had ever seen before. My dream of the young and beautiful wife had vanished, and I felt as if about to be ushered into the presence of some fantastic horror or deadly crime. The wet leaves plashed beneath my feet and sent up their clouds of autumn odour—the odour of death; unsightly insects and loathsome reptiles glided before me with a strange familiarity which rendered them yet more loathly; not a bird twittered through the naked branches of the trees; the whole place had a wild, weird, haunted look; and, shivering with dread at I knew not what, I rang the rusty bell hanging loosely out of the chipped and broken socket. The peal startled me and brought out a small terrier, which came running round me, barking furiously and shrilly. The door was opened by a ragged, slip-shod servant-girl; and I was shown into a poorly furnished room, which seemed to be a kind of library—to judge, at least, by the open bookcase thinly stocked with shabby books. The room was close and musty; the fire in the grate was heaped up carefully towards the middle, and the sides blocked in by bricks. It was a mean fire: a stingy, shabby fire.

After waiting for some time, a gentleman and lady came in. She was a pale, weak, hopeless-looking woman; very tall, fair and slender; with a narrow forehead,

lustreless light blue eyes without eyelashes, scanty hair, straw-coloured ill-defined eyebrows, and very thin pale lips. She was slightly deformed, and carried her arms thrust back from the elbow, the hands left to dangle nervelessly from the wrists. She stooped, and was dressed in a limp faded cotton gown, in every way too scant and cold for the season. When she came in, her eyes were bent towards the soiled grey carpet, and she never raised them or made the least kind of salutation, but sat down on a chair near the window and began to unravel a strip of muslin. The gentleman was short and thick-set; active and determined-looking; with dark hair turning now to grey; a thick but evenly cut moustache joining his bushy whiskers—the large square heavy chin left bare; overhanging eyebrows with small, restless, passionate eyes beneath: in his whole face and bearing an expression of temper amounting to ferocity.

He spoke to me peremptorily and haughtily; asked me my name, age, family condition, previous history, as if he had been examining me on oath, scarcely waiting for my answers, and all the while fixing me with those small angry eyes till I felt dazed and restless, and as if under torture. Then he said, abruptly—

"You have a strange look—a scared look, I may call it. How have you come by it?"

"I am of a nervous temperament, sir," I answered, pulling at the ends of my gloves.

"Nothing else? Nothing hereditary?"

"Yes, sir," said I as steadily as I could; "there is hereditary misfortune among us."

"Father or mother?"

"Mother."

"Ah!" said the man, rubbing his moustache and looking at me with eyes all aflame; "so much the nearer and more dangerous."

"I am not dangerous," I said, a little too humbly perhaps; but that man was completely subduing me. "I am nervous, but I have no worse tendency."

He laughed.

"Perhaps not," he said with a sneer that made my blood curdle; "no one ever has. Don't you know that all maniacs are philosophers, when they are not kings and queens? Shall I take you on trust then, according to your own estimate of yourself, or discharge you at once, according to mine?"

"I think I may be trusted, sir," I answered, looking everywhere but into his face.

"What do you think, Mrs. Brand?" he said, turning to the pale woman unravelling her strip of muslin and who had not, as I thought, looked at me once yet.

"She is ugly," said she in a dull, monotonous voice; "I don't like ugly people."

Mr. Brand laughed again.

"Never mind that, Mrs. Brand; goodness don't go

by looks, does it, Miss—Miss what? Are you a name or a number?"

"Miss Erfurt."

"Oh yes! I forgot—Jane Erfurt—I remember now, and a queer name it is, too—does it, Miss Jane Erfurt?"

"Not always, sir," I said, moving restlessly.

"Well, Mrs. Brand, what do you say?"

"She is ugly and George will not like her," said the lady in the same half-alive manner.

"Who the deuce cares!" shouted Mr. Brand, flaming with passion on the instant. "Let him like her or not, who cares for a stupid fool, or for what he thinks? That, for his liking!" snapping his fingers insolently.

The lady's face grew a shade paler; but, beyond a furtive, terrified glance at her husband she took no notice of his words. He then turned abruptly to me, and told me that I was to hold myself engaged to perform the duties of companion to Mrs. Brand, and that I was to enter on those duties early next week.

"But without the lady's consent?" said I, too weak to resist, and too nervous too accept.

She put away her muslin and rose. "Mr. Brand is master here," she said; "do what he tells you; it saves trouble."

The week after I went to Fenhouse, as the companion of Mrs. Brand.

The first day's dinner was a strange affair. After we

had seated ourselves, to what was a very scanty supply, there lounged in a youth of about seventeen: a heavy, full-blooded, lumpish being with a face devoid of intelligence, but more animal than imbecile; not specially good-tempered but not vicious; a mere idle, eating and drinking clown, scarcely raised above the level of a dog or a horse, and without even their instinctive emotions. What an unwholesome, unnatural circle we made! I longed for a little healthy life among us, and turned with a feeling of envy and relief to the commonplace servant-maid, who, if not intellectual, was at the least more in accord with ordinary life than we.

There was ill-blood between Mr. Brand and Master George, as the boy was called; and I soon understood why. His mother's only son by a former marriage, and heir of the neglected lands lying round Fenhouse, he stood in the way of his step-father whose influence over his wife was supreme, and who, but for the boy, would have absolute possession of everything. He had married for money and had been balked of half his prize. I used often to wonder that the two were not afraid to trust themselves in the hands of one so passionate and unscrupulous; but, though Mrs. Brand was undisguisedly afraid of her husband, and the boy was not too stupid to understand that he was hated, and why, neither seemed to look forward to evil days. I do not think that they had mind enough to look to the future

in hope or dread. Mother and son loved each other, with the mute instinctive love of dumb animals—a love which would be helpless to save either if bad times came. They were not much together and they seldom spoke when they met; but they sat close to each other, always in the same place and on the same chairs; and Mrs. Brand unravelled her eternal slips of muslin while her son gathered up the threads and thrust them into a canvas bag.

I had been there a fortnight, and I never saw either of them employed in anything else: and I never heard half a dozen words pass between them. It was a silent house at all times; and, more than this, it was a house full of hate. Save this dumb-animal kind of love between the two, not a ray of even kindly feeling existed among any of us. The servant was the mark for every one's ill temper; while I stood out as a kind of pariah among them all, not even dignified by active persecution. I was shunned, and could not understand why I was there at all. The lady never spoke to me, not even to say good morning; she gave me no duties, but she forbade me no employment. I was free to do what I liked, provided I did not make my existence too manifest to her, and did not speak to her husband or Master George. If by chance anything like a conversation began—for Mr. Brand had his talkative moods in a violent, angry kind of way—she used to

order me out of the room in just the same tone as that in which she spoke to the dog. If I remonstrated, as I did once, her only answer was: "You can go if you like; *I* did not hire you."

One thing especially troubled me. It troubled me because, like all morbidly imaginative people, anything of a mystery terrified me more than an open danger; and this, of which I am going to speak, was a mystery. The boy took no notice of me at the first. He never spoke to me when he came into the room; he passed me in the fields as if he did not see me; indeed, he had always that manner to me—he did not see me—I did not exist for him. I was well content that this should be; but, after I had been there a short time, Mr. Brand began to make distinct mischief between us. From brutish indifference, Master George passed rapidly to brutish aggression. When he met me in the lanes and fields he made mouths at me; once he flung stones and mud as I passed him; at table he would kick me silently; and whenever I caught his eye he made hideous grimaces, muttering in his broad, provincial accent: "Mad dog! mad dog! We hang mad dogs hereaway!" His insolence and brutality increased daily; and Mr. Brand encouraged him. This was the mystery. Why should he wish this lad to hate me?

There was a plot underneath it all which I tormented myself to discover. Day and night the thought

haunted me, till I felt growing crazed with dread and terror. I could not conceal my abhorrence of the youth —I was too nervous for that—nor hide the fear with which that wicked man inspired me. I was as helpless as the poor pale woman there; and as thoroughly the victim of a stronger fate.

One night Master George had been more than usually intolerable to me. He had struck me openly before both father and mother; had insulted my misfortunes, and spoken with brutal disrespect of my family. It was a wild winter's night, and the howling wind shook the windows and dashed the trailing ivy-leaves sharply against the panes; a fearful night, making all visions of freedom and escape impossible; a night which necessitated one to be content with one's own fireside and forbade the idea of wandering afield. Yet it was something worse than death to me to be shut up in that mean room with its squalid furniture and scanty fire, with such companions as I had and to feel that I could not escape them—that they might ill-treat me, mock me, persecute me as they would, and I was bound to bear all without protection or means of escape. The stormy night had excited me, and I felt less than ever able to bear all the insolence and brutality heaped upon me. When Master George struck me again, and called me "mad dog," something seemed to take possession of me. My timidity and nervousness vanished, and I felt as if

swept away in a very tumult of passion. I do not know now what it was that I said or did, but I remember rising passionately from my place, and pouring out a torrent of bitterness and reproach. I was almost unconscious of what I was doing, for I was literally for the moment insane; but I remember the words: "You shall die! you shall die!" rising like a scream through the room. I have not the slightest recollection of how I left the parlour, nor how I got to my own chamber, but it was past midnight when I awoke from what must have been a kind of swoon and found myself lying on the floor.

The wind was still raging, howling through the trees outside, tearing down branches and scattering the dead leaves like flakes of frozen snow on the ground. Every door and window shook throughout the old house, and the wild moaning in the chimneys startled one like the cries of tortured beings. Confused and giddy, I rose up out of my trance, stiff with cold and scarcely conscious. But as my brain grew clearer it grew also feverish, and I knew there was no rest for me to-night. My hearing began to be distressingly acute, and every painful thought and circumstance of my life rose up before me with the force and vividness of living scenes actually present to my senses. I paced my room for some time in a state of despair, wringing my hands and sobbing violently, but without tears.

By degrees a little calmness came to me, and I determined to go downstairs for a book. I would get some quiet, calm, religious book which would soothe me like a spiritual opiate, and take me out of the abyss of misery into which I had sunk. What friend, indeed had I in the world, save the Great Father above us all?

As I opened the door I fancied I heard a stealthy step along the passage. I held my breath to listen, shading the candle with my hand. I was not deceived; there *was* a step passing furtively over the creaking boards in the direction of Master George's room. I shrank back into the doorway. Yet there was nothing to alarm me. A quiet footfall at midnight might be easily accounted for: why should it affect me with mistrust and dread? and why should I feel this overpowering impulse to go towards the sound? I scarcely knew what I expected to find; but something stronger than myself seemed to impel me to the discovery of something horrible; and, placing the candle on the floor, I crept noiselessly along the passage, every nerve strung to its utmost tension.

Master George slept in a room at the end of the back-stairs gallery which ran at right angles to the passage in which my room was situated. My door faced Mr. and Mrs. Brand's; Master George's faced the kitchen stairs, and was properly the servant's room, but she had been moved to a small closet near to me,

Mr. Brand not approving of her holding so large a chamber for herself, or willing to allow the boy any of a better class. When I stood by my door I could see Mr. and Mrs. Brand's room; but it was only by going the whole length of the back-stairs gallery that I could get to Master George's. I could see now however, that his door was open, for a ray of light fell along the staircase wall; and I could hear his heavy snoring breath. And I heard another sound. I heard a man's step in the room; I heard the boards creak and the bed-clothes softly rustle; I heard an impatient kind of moan as of some one disturbed in his sleep, and then a heavy blow, a stifled groan, a man's deep-drawn breath and the quick, sharp drip of something spilt on the floor. Dumb from terror, I stood in the doorway of the boy's room. Pale, heavy, motionless on the bed lay the youth, his large limbs carelessly flung abroad in the unconsciousness of sleep and his face as calm and quiet as if still dreaming. The sheets were wet with red blood; the light of the candle glistening on a small red stream that flowed over the side of the bed to the floor beneath. At a little distance stood Mr. Brand, wiping a knife on a handkerchief. He turned; and our eyes met. He came up to me with an oath, caught me by the throat and drew the knife across my hands. I remember no more until I awoke in the broad daylight, and found myself in the midst of a crowd gathered round my bed.

Curious eyes stared at me; harsh voices mocked me; rough hands were laid upon me; and I heard myself branded with the burning name of Murderess. Red tracks made by a woman's naked feet—made by *my* feet—led from the boy's room to mine; each track plainly printed on the bare uncarpeted floor—tracks of a woman's feet—and of none other. There was no explaining away these marks and signs of guilt. Who would believe me, a half-mad lonely stranger with such a family history as mine, and, according to popular belief, at any moment liable to make a murderous attack against one offending? Had not this unhappy youth notoriously offended?—and had I not, only that very evening, openly defied and threatened him? Escape was impossible. Against all the evidence heaped up against me with such art and cunning, I had but unsupported accusation, which would be set down as maniacal raving, and only deepen the case against me.

All day I lay there; all that weary sobbing winter's day; and when the night came they fastened me with cords and left me once more alone. I was so well secured—bound hand and foot, and triply bound—that it was not thought needful to watch me; and they were all too much excited and overwrought to wish to remain through the night with a lunatic murderer, as I was called. So they went, and Mr. Brand locked the

door, saying, as he turned away: "We must have no more such dangerous fits of madness, Miss Erfurt!" with a sneer on the word.

I was too hopeless and desolate to think of any plan of escape, feasible or not. The reaction had set in, and I was content to lie there in quiet and to feel that I had done with life for ever. It had not offered me so many joys that I should grieve to leave it; and for the shame—who cares for shame in the grave? No; I was content to have done with all that had weighed upon me so long and heavily. I had no one to mourn for me; no one to love me with a broken heart and a sorrowed faith; I was alone—alone—and might well die out at once and sleep tranquilly in my murdered grave. And I was not unhappy, thinking all these things. Perhaps my brain was slightly paralyzed, so that I could not suffer. However it might be, it was a merciful moment of calm.

It was nearly three o'clock when I heard a light hand upon the door. The key was turned softly in the lock, and, pale and terrible like an avenging ghost, the mother of the murdered boy glided into my room. She came up to my bed and silently unfastened the cords. She said no comforting word; she gave me no kind look, no pitying human touch; but in a strange, weak, wan way, she unbound me limb by limb until I was free.

"Go," she then said below her breath, still not looking at me. "I do not love you, and *he* did not; but I know that you are innocent and I do not want your blood on my head. My turn is to come next, but I do not mind, now he has gone. Go at once; that sleep will not last long. I made it come for you."

Without another word she turned from the room, leaving the door open. I got up as she bade me. Without energy, without hope, I quietly dressed myself and left the house, going forth into the darkness and desolation, more because I had been bidden to do so than to escape a greater peril. I wandered through the by-roads aimlessly, nervelessly; not shaping my course for any goal, but simply going forwards to wherever chance might lead me. A poor woman gave me some milk, and I slept, I believe, once beneath a haystack. I remember lying down there and finding myself again after many hours. In time—I cannot tell you how or when, nor how long I had been out in the fields—but it was evening and the lamps were lighted—I was in London, reading a description of myself posted up against the walls. I saw myself described as a murderess and maniac, and a reward offered for my apprehension; my dress, my manners, appearance, gait, voice, all were so minutely noted as to render safety impossible. Seized with terror, I fled: I fled like a wild being hunted and pursued, and I have never rested since.

THE BEST TO WIN.

THE BEST TO WIN.

PART I.

THE START.

A FINE estate nursed by a long minority; a young heiress coming to take possession, having escaped from the bondage of Chancery and the clutches of her guardians—having too completed her education and made the most of herself by travel and new sights. Was not this enough to set the whole society of Wensley in a ferment?—to excite every brain with wild conjectures of disaster or good fortune, according to the circumstances of the person concerned? Each mother with a marriageable daughter felt the arrival of Miss Calvert—Miss Julia Calvert—as the charge of an enemy; each widow, still possible, prepared to receive in her a mortal foe; but the women with grown-up sons smiled complacently, and the men without wives looked twice in the glass where they had looked only once before.

She came into the little world where henceforth she was to reign supreme, as a creature endowed by the fairies with every good gift possible to humanity. She had the prestige of youth, a vague repute for beauty, and one rather less vague for oddity; but more than all else, she came with the blazing honours of wealth and position, and had she been old, ugly and with a character for something worse than oddity, she would have been the dominant circumstance of the hour and the country would have been at her feet all the same as now.

There were three men in the place marked out by nature to be the principal aspirants for Miss Julia Calvert's hand—men destined to stand in the relation of triangular duelists, each against each, until such time as she should choose a husband to profit by her guardians' savings. These three were the Rev. Mr. Tufnell, the young vicar of the parish, a man of good family and influential friends, the son of a bishop, and though young and rather weak, himself destined to come in time to ecclesiastical dignities; Mr. Ralph Mattison, the owner of Shoreham Close which adjoined Beechover, Miss Calvert's estate, on the right; and a certain Honourable Captain Luxmoore, whose place, Ashdown Manor, adjoined it on the left. Thus—with the spire of the church seen at the end of the long elm-tree avenue from the drawing-room windows of Beechover—the

young heiress was set as it were in the centre of the triangle; and those of the county personally uninterested—young married folks and parents of callow broods—looked on in amused expectancy as to which of the three would win the race that all felt sure would be set afoot.

They were three good-looking young men of well-defined types: the clergyman smooth-faced, soft-voiced, with long wavy brown hair—a cross between an apostle and an artist, as some said like St. John, and others, less profane, like Raffaelle; Mr. Ralph Mattison, a stalwart English gentleman of the muscular school, with the short curly hair of an athlete, light-blue eyes and a frank smile, by no means one of your illiterate squires whose soul alternates between the hounds and the crops, but a man of fashion and a gentleman, if too good-natured to be very dignified and too self-complacent to be very sensitive; and Captain Luxmoore, tall, dark, well set up, an Indian officer assumed to have a history and who, because he was reserved and unsocial, was pronounced wicked by his social inferiors, and disliked in consequence. The general feeling of religious respectability was in favour of the clergyman; the Laodiceans, standing midway between worldly and religious respectability, went for the young squire; while those who upheld the captain were of the two extremes—the aristocratic and supreme, like the Freshfields; or the looser of the lowest class—and not many

of even these. A reserved man, who goes his own way and lets the rest of the world go theirs unhindered, is never very popular. Second-rate gentilities want show and fuss if they are to be propitiated; and the greatest offence of which the finer sort of gentlefolks can be guilty is to treat them with quietness and good breeding. Hence, very few of those who disposed of Miss Calvert's hand—without her consent—assigned it to the owner of Ashdown Manor; and in the triangular duel set by circumstance and nature he was assumed to have the worst place and the smallest chance.

Meanwhile Miss Julia Calvert came to Beechover, took possession, arranged her household, and displayed herself.

She did not seem to be the kind of girl to be disposed of without her will. Indeed she looked a young lady of an eminently decided will, to judge by the ringing tones of her clear voice, the firm tread of her small feet, the proud bearing of her handsome head and the complete self-possession of her manner. When she walked up the long room at the assize ball she walked as if she had been the young queen of the district passing among her subjects; one who knew her place and meant that others should know it too; one who, if society fell at her feet, thought it good for a footstool, and manifestly intended to keep it there. She was accompanied by Mrs. Marsh, the lady who acted as her

chaperon and companion, but who, a censorious world might have said, looked as if she needed some such functionary on her own account. She was a pretty, dark-haired, piquante little person whose small form and low tones contrasted well with the broader lines and richer tints of her well-developed charge, each enhancing the other by a contrast more suggestive of artistic completeness than of conventional safety.

In the group of *aristoi* standing in a little world apart, gravitating to the top of the room by the law of their being, were Lord and Lady Freshfield; the Listers and the Vernons; the Pagets and the Powers; the De Lacy Smiths and the Du Marc Browns; Mr. Mattison talking to Miss Lucy Paget; Captain Luxmoore listening to Lady Freshfield; and the apostolic Mr. Tufnell, who, on the high-road to ecclesiastical dignities, thought it wise not to renounce the world where his future influence had mainly to be felt. For as our bishops are gentlemen who do not sully their white hands by meddling with the unwashed and ill-conditioned sheep, it behoves them to keep terms with the cleaner sort, and to share their lives if they would save their souls.

Lord and Lady Freshfield went forward to greet the handsome young heiress as she came up to the "cream of the cream," whereof she was one of the most noticeable drops. Dressed in white and gold, with ornaments of diamonds and pearls, she looked really regal; and

she bore herself as she looked, gazing round on the assembly with calm, full, unflinching eyes that seemed to measure and subdue them all. She looked gracious, however, and glad when she saw the Freshfields, whom she had known last year in Rome; and she returned their cordial greeting by one as frank.

On the whole they were favourably disposed towards her; though Lady Freshfield, who was a colourless woman afflicted with neuralgia and dyspepsia, preaching submission and inferiority as among the things dealt out by Providence to the weaker sex, was inclined to think her a little too pronounced for good taste. But as my lord upheld her, my lady, to be consistent, was forced to follow his lead and uphold her too, in spite of the firm tread, the long steps, the ringing voice, the decided opinions and the authoritative assumption which announced Miss Julia Calvert as a young person sadly needing a husband to keep her in wholesome check.

Acting then as social sponsors, Lord and Lady Freshfield presented her subjects to the new queen, and watched the impression that she made.

On Mr. Tufnell and Mr. Mattison it was decidedly favourable. It might almost be called love at first sight. Mr. Tufnell coloured and lowered his eyes with a kind of poetic inward admiration; Mr. Mattison opened his wide, and smiled all over his face; and both

took it to heart, as a matter for personal congratulation, that the owner of Beechover was a beautiful young woman still unmarried. But Captain Luxmoore neither blushed like the vicar nor smiled like the squire. He was just as quiet and with an air as retrospectively historical as ever; and Miss Calvert, seeming to see in him at once a rebel, after looking at him with a kind of surprise, swept past him with the finest little touch of disdain in her superb head, and left him to pallid Lady Freshfield undisturbed. She found the flutter and open admiration of the others more to her taste—also more in accord with her usual experience; and she resented as an affront the indifference of that tall, distinguished-looking warrior, whose dark eyes had no flattery in them, but only calm scrutiny, and who looked as if he intended to be the one bold dissentient who would dispute her sovereignty.

"Who *is* that Captain Luxmoore?" Miss Calvert asked presently of Mr. Mattison with whom she had just been dancing.

"A queer ungenial kind of fellow; your neighbour—as I am," he answered. "I am on your right; he on your left."

"Then I am between you?" said the heiress with a little laugh. "I hope not as a bone of contention."

"As a treasure we are both bound to guard with our lives," returned Ralph gallantly.

Miss Calvert turned her large gray eyes on him approvingly.

"But I do not want guarding," she said after a moment's pause, giving her golden head the faintest little toss. "I am sufficient for myself."

"So you may be, but you will be none the worse for extra care. It is the masculine privilege," he said.

"And the feminine disgrace," she answered, with the look of a young Pallas laying her lance in rest for a lunge at the baser sex in a body. "Why should we be taken care of, merely because we are women? We are not idiots, though I believe the law—the law which you men make," with a contemptuous accent on the word "men"—"ranks us with children and lunatics."

"Still, you are not the worse for being protected from creatures stronger than yourselves, and not always better," urged Mr. Mattison, standing gallantly to his guns, and too obtuse to see that he was treading on dangerous ground.

"Public opinion should be sufficient to protect us," said Miss Calvert superbly. "If you are stronger than we, you should be so much better. There should be no question of protection at all. Protection! it is an insult!"

"No, no; protection is our duty," repeated Mr. Mattison, wide of the point.

"It shall never be said of me," cried the heiress a

little hotly: "I intend to live my own life, and to force every one to respect it. I do not want protection!"

"You must let us disobey you for your own good," answered Ralph, with whom women were as eggshells, and men the granite cups in which they were to be held in safety, and who did not understand Miss Calvert's ethics any more than he understood the Positive Philosophy. "We men were sent into the world to take care of those beings who are so much higher and better than we are, and who cannot take care of themselves."

"We can," repeated Miss Calvert with energy; "and I for one will!"

During this conversation Mr. Tufnell, thinking that, failing the rose, that which dwelt nearest to it was better than nothing, set himself to propitiate pretty little Mrs. Marsh. She had been courteously entreated by the Freshfields, else perhaps Mr. Tufnell, who believed in principalities and powers, would not have gone out of his way to be civil to her; but as things were she seemed to be a nicely arranged hook on which he might advantageously hang a few initial loops. He thought too that he might get from her some useful information about Miss Calvert's inner self; her likes and dislikes, opinions, views, and so forth; for as he was a meek and amenable kind of person, whose favourite motto was *reculer pour mieux sauter*, it would be better for him to fall into step at once, instead of

trying the wrong foot first and then having to shift to the right.

His questions were really very trenchant, though they were softly spoken and delicately worded; but the companion was as clever as the clergyman, and had no intention of throwing light into dark places for the better guidance of a matrimonial burglar, or of knotting up a rope-ladder by which he might ascend and she be thrust out. She had heard the local gossip from the upper servants, and knew what was expected of the triangular duelists. Hence she regarded them all as her enemies, and was not disposed to play into their hands.

When he asked her what were Miss Calvert's favourite pursuits—did she favour the splendour of Ritualism, the searching spirituality of Evangelicalism, or the noble generosity of the Broad Church? had she her heart in simple parish work, or did she prefer to influence her own, the educated class?—he need not ask if she had gone into the touching delusion of asceticism; her splendid health and magnificent physique answered that question before it was made!—but what were her views on the administration of riches?—Mrs. Marsh made uncommunicative replies, and never true ones; the only answer near the truth being, that Miss Calvert was of the new school of man-haters—with a pretty little laugh—fond of her own way and determined never to marry.

"She does not look capable of hating any one," said Mr. Tufnell softly, as Julia appeared on Mr. Mattison's arm, her bright face slightly flushed, her fine eyes full of life and fire, her whole appearance one of abounding vitality and the very excess of youthful vigour. "Hate is for the old and soured, not for such a glorious creature as that," he added with fervour.

"Do not be deceived by appearances," said Mrs. Marsh quietly. "Julia is, as I say, a decided man-hater; and if ever she marries it will only be one who will consent to be her slave."

"The post would not be difficult nor the part irksome," said meek Mr. Tufnell. "Slavery is pleasant under some leaderships."

Mrs. Marsh glanced up into his face.

She had nice brown eyes, dark curly hair that fluttered in becoming little ripples about her low forehead, a pretty mouth—a trifle thin, and a pretty chin—a trifle pointed; altogether a very dainty little person, whose assumptions of chaperonage over such a splendid young woman as Julia Calvert, a head and shoulders taller than herself and strong enough to have taken her up under one arm as a child might take a kitten, seemed almost a farce.

"It is very good of you to say that," she said with a fascinating smile. "I am sure now that you will be

friends. It is just what dear Julia likes—submission, absolute submission."

This was said in rather a low tone as the bright and vigorous owner of Beechover came back to her chaperon, smiling on her blithely and dismissing Mr. Mattison to take up Mr. Tufnell.

It was now his innings; and he was soon deep in an animated talk about the parish, the poor, the charities and the like. The ball was spun down this professional groove by Miss Calvert herself; for to do the vicar justice he eschewed "the shop," as Captain Luxmoore used to say somewhat irreverently, with as much care when in society as if there had never been a laying on of hands at all, and his clerical tie was an emblem of no more sanctity than a waiter's. But as Miss Calvert preferred to take him wholly on his professional standpoint, he was forced to hold himself steady where she had placed him.

She found him tractable and he found her generous. She promised quite a cycle of subscriptions, and seemed ready to forward on all sides what he sweetly called "the work." But he was quick enough to mark, amidst all his flutter and fascination, that she always said "I," and that she only asked for information, not for advice. Evidently she was not one of the kind who needed a director; and so far Mr. Tufnell acknowledged that Mrs. Marsh had spoken the truth—there was nothing for it but submission.

All this time Captain Luxmoore took no part in the race that had begun. He stood in a lounging attitude against the wall, talking to such as wandered by; but he declined to put himself in competition with the two already on the course, and he seemed as if he did not care even to make his first impression favourable. But Miss Calvert often looked at him as he stood slightly apart from the rest of the crowd. He was too handsome, too distinguished-looking, to be passed over; and she felt his indifference more keenly than she had ever felt anything of the kind before. He quite annoyed her, made her petulant and cross, and seemed to rob the evening of half its pleasure and more than half its social success. She could not understand it, she said to herself; and she was determined not to allow it; though what she proposed to do was about as hazy as what she was decided not to allow. At all events she was annoyed; and the captain saw that she was.

"I consider that Captain Luxmoore behaved quite rudely to me," she said with temper to her chaperon, as they returned home.

"So do I," said Mrs. Marsh. "But it was a pleasant ball, I think, on the whole."

"Pretty well," said the heiress a little crossly. "Mr. Mattison is as dense as if he was made of wood, and Mr. Tuffnell is a goose."

The companion laughed.

"Yes," she said; "you are quite right, Julia; the one is, as you say, a blockhead, and the other an awful goose."

"But he is very amiable, and Mr. Mattison is certainly handsome," said Julia, veering.

"Do you think so?" asked Mrs. Marsh in a tone of surprise.

"Do I think so? Of course I do! Who could think anything else?" said Miss Calvert, letting down the window without thinking whether her friend would like the frosty midnight air or not. "And Captain Luxmoore is odious!"

"Odious indeed, dear!"

"But handsomer than Mr. Mattison," said Julia, relenting. "And what splendid eyes he has! what a distinguished-looking man altogether!"

"Take care!" laughed Mrs. Marsh. "We shall be having you caught by the handsome captain if you are so enthusiastic."

"How can you be so absurd!" snapped the heiress who had known her present chaperon for years, and treated her more like a sister than a companion. "You are always thinking of love-affairs and weddings. It is horrid. I wonder at you, Hetty; such vilely bad form—and to *me* too!"

"Peccavi!" cried Hetty Marsh, her brown eyes twinkling.

After this the county was as if possessed about Miss Calvert. She was in every one's mouth; and the final cause of every one's existence seemed to be to do her honour. The Freshfields gave a dinner; the Vernons a ball; the Powers a luncheon; the Pagets a *soirée;* the De Lacy Smiths had private theatricals; the Du Marc Browns *tableaux vivants*—all on account of her; and notes of invitation flew about the country like the far-famed leaves of Vallombrosa. Mr. Tufnell made himself feverish by the little network of plans which were to include Miss Calvert as his parochial right hand; but she preferred to be Lady Bountiful on her own account and declined his leading-strings with disdain. Where she was she must be mistress and no man's helper; thus costing the "Raffaelle-faced young priest" many an anxious hour in thinking how he should insure the substantial good of her help yet avoid offending her by seeming to check her absolute independence of action, while preserving the appearance of his own authority unimpaired to the multitude. It was a nice balancing of opposing forces; but the vicar was a man to whom such nice balancing came as second nature.

Mr. Mattison, as Master of the Hounds, claimed her as his Diana, and proposed a new button for the Hunt, embodying the idea; Julia assenting with the frank pleasure of a pretty woman not disinclined to be

reminded of her beauty. Her assent made the squire happy; and set him speculating on the improvements that he would make when Beechover was his own and Shoreham was let on a twenty-one-years' lease—to be kept aired till it was wanted for their eldest son. And when he gave the regulation breakfast on the first day of the season, where Diana reigned as queen, he showed his mind so manifestly that folks began to talk, somewhat prematurely, and a few made bets as to the very month when it would be.

Mr. Tufnell was discomposed by this breakfast and the button. He knew the weakness of humanity and how it goes after the fleshpots and hankers for the jewels of gold and jewels of silver which are not to be had in the "higher life"—as he chose to call his small parochial agitations, which had nothing high about them save his own self-estimate. Penny-banks and clothing-clubs have not much chance with handsome vigorous young heiresses, in competition with Hunt breakfasts and emblematic buttons; and so he said to Mrs. Marsh, looking downcast and doleful, feeling himself distanced, and showing what he felt;—which was unwise in the apostolic vicar. Miss Calvert was a woman, hence cruel to the men who were at her feet, and if given the whip sure to use it with effect. It amused her to see the young clergyman look as if the world, and all it held, had been given over to Satan and destruction

because Mr. Mattison's star was in the ascendant; just as it amused her to see the squire's boundless satisfaction when she allowed him to singe his wings at her candle. She played with both; and threw each crumbs alternately with pellets. When she had smiled the vicar into the lowest abasement of humility, so that he was less the priest than the acolyte in her presence, then she would turn on him superbly, and tell him that a clergyman should have more settled convictions and not be so weak as to defer to the opinions of a mere girl like herself. When she had lured Mr. Mattison to the very verge of a declaration, she would suddenly pull him up, all standing as it were, and say that she would only marry into the peerage if she ever married at all, and if a commoner should ask her she considered he would take an unwarrantable liberty with her which would end their acquaintance; and that she would never forgive such an affront. Then the next time they met she would be all smiles and graciousness, the most bewitching siren to be found within the four seas, so sweet and charming and alluring that the bewildered squire scarcely knew what to think, and was half inclined to believe she was madly in love with him of her own accord and wanted him to propose that very day. She tried the same kind of thing with Captain Luxmoore; but in vain. He stood aloof, and would not be subdued nor yet deceived. She could do

nothing with him. Her grand airs, which fascinated Ralph Mattison and dominated the weak-minded vicar, were quietly put aside by him as the affectations of a child, pretty if you will, but silly and not worth serious attention. When she vaunted her independence he smiled, a quiet superior kind of smile, and said that was just what people always did—prided themselves on that of which they had least: was she not a woman? how, then, could she be independent? When she was angry, he was cool; if she was haughty, he was bland; when she disdained him, he ignored her contempt and accepted it with maddening indifference; when she smiled on him, he was gravely responsive but never caught; and neither by coldness nor—something that was not coldness—could she touch him. He was always himself, never her plaything; neither elated by her smiles nor depressed by her frowns: altogether the most disappointing and enigmatic of her world—the one whom she strove the hardest to gain and the one who was utterly unimpressionable.

She resented his attitude towards her bitterly, and complained of it daily to her companion.

"He treats me disgracefully!" she used to say to Hetty Marsh, with flushing cheeks and flashing eyes; and Hetty always answered warmly: "Yes, dear, disgracefully!"

It was not for her to pour oil on the troubled waters.

She thought it well to be free of two of her natural enemies—the vicar whom she led on the wrong way, and the captain for whom she widened the breach that he himself had made. She was not afraid of Mr. Mattison. He took too much on trust; and Julia liked to be entreated. She also needed to be mastered while delicately handled, and her varying moods seized and followed with subtle tact; having the complex character of a high-spirited woman whose heart is right if her head is wrong. But unless that complex character was rightly understood and ministered to, she would be still safe for Hetty; and the luxurious home and handsome salary, which made up her so-called chaperonage, would be secure for yet a few years longer.

PART II.

THE RACE.

Really Miss Calvert was becoming a public nuisance! At least the ladies said so among themselves, though the gentlemen looked sly and muttered uncomplimentary paraphrases to the reeds when the women fell foul of the handsome heiress—all for her own good; and still for her own good wished the men would not make such a fuss with her. Even Lady Freshfield lamented as undesirable, not to say indecorous, the prominent position taken by one so young: and one day said to Captain Luxmoore, who was a favourite of hers, that she wished Miss Calvert would put an end to this absurd state of things and take one of the two for good.

"Take one of which two?" asked the captain innocently.

"Mr. Tufnell or Mr. Mattison," was the answer.

"Oh, those two!" he drawled. "Yes, it would be better; but which?"

"Either," said Lady Freshfield generously.

"Would either suit her equally?" he asked with an air of ingenuous inquiry.

"Surely! As a wife she would learn to love her husband, whoever he might be; for women can always be won by their husbands. Besides, it is their duty to love them," she answered, with the hazy logic and crumpled grammar of her kind.

"Just so; but not very flattering, is it, to men of character who would like to be loved for themselves?" Captain Luxmoore asked, still ingenuous.

"You would not like a nice girl to fall in love with you before she was asked?" cried Lady Freshfield, a little scandalized.

"No; I should not like a forward young person in that line," he answered. "But I confess I have so much of the weakness of my sex as to dislike the idea of any other man 'doing as well' as myself. I should like to feel *the* one, and the only one."

"Well, perhaps I have gone too far," said Lady Freshfield. "I will grant her a preference; but I wish she would show it, and put an end to this unpleasant excitement and not very delicate prominence. She puts me in mind of that picture in the Royal Academy, the 'Babylonian Marriage-Market;' and that, you know, is a horrid idea. By-the-by," suddenly, "why don't you try your fortune with her, Captain Luxmoore? Beechover is a pretty place, and would round off with Ashdown perfectly."

"I!" He shrugged his shoulders. "I care nothing for Beechover, and she cares nothing for me, Lady Freshfield. Miss Calvert and I do not agree on a single subject we have ever discussed; and I think if you were to ask who it is that she hates most in the world, she would say myself. We are like fire and water together; and she makes no secret of her aversion."

"Then you could follow Mrs. Malaprop's advice; which however is very shocking," said Lady Freshfield, checking herself gravely as she was beginning to laugh.

"The field is not open to me," repeated the captain with more than his usual quietness of manner—so quiet indeed as to appear forced and a little unnatural. "I should be nowhere against our apostolic vicar who has no mind but hers, and an unsuspecting soul like Mr. Mattison who never sees when they are at cross purposes, and whose temper is of that persistent sweetness which nothing can sour. I am too decided in my own views for Miss Calvert, and too proud to enter the lists against such men as Mr. Tufnell and Mr. Mattison."

"Oh," said Lady Freshfield innocently; "don't say that; you are far wiser than either."

This conversation took place at a school-feast that had been got up by Miss Calvert, assisted by the vicar,

to break the weariness of winter and give the poorer little ones a glimpse of the fairyland created by the dazzling fruitage of a Christmas-tree. As she stood there on a raised platform, dispensing toys and sugar-plums, the Diana of the Hunt looked a very charming young Lady Bountiful, dashed with the feminine independence of the new school of man-haters—so charming that it was not to be wondered at, all things considered, if Mr. Tufnell offered himself as her sacrifice, or if Mr. Mattison, serenely certain of winning in the long-run—as a manly man must when the question is only the subjugation of a woman—built Spanish castles on the Beechover grounds and lived in them comfortably.

Both men were now hovering about her as usual; but as this was the vicar's day, the squire's star was under a partial eclipse; as that of the former had been on the day of the Hunt breakfast. She, radiant, supreme, fond of power, confident of herself and contemptuous of the baser sex, held her pair in hand with consummate skill, playing them off one against the other till she made them both half mad, now with love and now with jealousy; but all the same she looked often to that part of the room where Captain Luxmoore stood saying to Lady Freshfield things which he did not believe. Not looking pleasantly, granted; rather with the anger of a pretty woman who wanted to be admired and felt herself slighted. Still, she looked.

After a time the captain drifted from Lady Freshfield, and wandered in his slow uninterested way to the daïs where she stood.

"Can I be of any use?" he asked, as she was handing a tin trumpet to a certain beatified little Hodge.

"Thank you, no; I have almost finished," said Miss Calvert, straightening her slender neck. "And at no time should I have dreamed of asking you to help me," she added in a lower voice that slightly trembled, ending with an unpleasant laugh.

"No? Why?" innocently.

"Captain Luxmoore at a school-feast, making himself amiable to peasant children, distributing toys and sticky sugar-plums—that would indeed be beating his sword into a ploughshare!" she said ironically.

"Should I be more out of place than Miss Calvert?" he asked in a voice as veiled as her own. "Should I not be following her example if I chose to perform such an act of humbug? What are you doing?"

"My duty," said Julia superbly.

"So at least you think it wise to say," he answered; "but you know better. *Au fond*, we are not so very far apart."

"I am as far as the poles from all that *you* are, Captain Luxmoore," returned Miss Calvert a little too bitterly for play. Then looking at Mr. Tufnel, she said with a Circe-like smile, which he was meant to

take to himself as his prospective reward should he answer discreetly, "Tell me, Mr. Tufnell, are not Captain Luxmoore and I the very antipodes of each other?"

"I do not see much likeness, certainly," stammered Mr. Tufnell, as unwilling to contradict the young queen of the parish as to offend one of its princes; and while wishing to conciliate each, failing both, as trimmers generally do.

Miss Calvert shot a scornful glance at him that went near to undo all the glory of the day, so specially his.

"Mr. Mattison," she said, "do *you* tell me! Do you think that Captain Luxmoore and I are alike?"

"Certainly not," said Ralph with energy and a laugh. "You and Luxmoore alike? Absurd! It would be odd if you were."

"I mean in mind and disposition, not in face," said the heiress pettishly. "How stupid you all are!"

"Oh," said Ralph good-temperedly; "now I take you. Well, I don't know. No, I should say not. It would be paying Luxmoore too high a compliment," with another laugh.

"As I am not fond of being made the subject of discussion, may I ask you to change the conversation?" said the captain quietly, but with a certain gravity too close on the border-land of displeasure to look like trifling. "Now may I help you?"

"No," answered Julia rudely; and Captain Luxmoore, taking her rebuff with the placidity with which he took all things, stood by the tree for a few moments as if examining the toys critically, then lounged back to his former post near Lady Freshfield and the door.

No one had eyes quick enough to see that Miss Calvert's hands trembled and her cheeks flushed, as the man credited with a history drifted away from her with such patient equanimity, save perhaps that man himself. And he, with eyes that could watch and never show they looked, saw the ill-suppressed storm as clearly as if it had been transacted in physical thunder and lightning, instead of an angry flush and an impatient quiver; and felt a not unnatural pleasure in his power to disturb one who had so much power to disturb others.

Presently the little pageant began to dissolve. The children were drawn up in order, and sang a short hymn of adulation to their "kind patroness," composed and written by Mr. Tufnell. It was a vapid composition and full of bad taste; but Mrs. Marsh whispered, with crocodile tears in her light-brown eyes, that it was quite as pretty as any of Mendelssohn's "Songs without Words," and that she was sure dear Julia would think so too.

The young heiress however, looked more embar-

rassed than pleased, wondering if Captain Luxmoore thought she had known of this piece of idiotcy, and wishing that she could tell him she hated it, and that she thought Mr. Tufnell the "most awful goose for doing it." But she had to content herself with her own thoughts. The captain looked as if the thing in no way interested him, and did not offer her a square inch of opportunity for explanation or disclaimer. It was provoking; but what could she do? She was caught in a trap which she herself had helped to set; and if Captain Luxmoore thought worse of her than ever, she was to blame for her own folly, and must bear it.

But Miss Calvert was by no means patient in her generation, and did not like to have to bear even her own self-made unpleasantnesses.

After the hymn the children filed out—the girls dipping, the boys making parabolic salutations, as is their wont; and when they were at the gate they gave a shrill cheer, led by Mr. Mattison, which startled the horses so that some of the carriages blocking up the road nearly came to grief; and with this tonic yell the school-feast ended and the vicar's star paled.

Now there was a general crowding of fine ladies and gentlemen round the heiress; all thanking her in the name of the nation and humanity for the marvellous kindness that she had shown in spending five pounds

in trash to make some thirty little sinners happy. And they all said that they hoped the poor people, whose generous friend and patroness she had been, would be as grateful as they ought to be.

"I hope they will," said Julia, who was no social democrat if a woman's-rights woman on her own account. If she had lighted her lamp she had no desire to hide it under a bushel. She did not believe in doing good by stealth and blushing to find it fame. On the contrary, it suited her nature that the things done should be the things known, and that virtue should have other reward than its own.

"They ought! They deserve horsewhipping else!" said Mr. Mattison warmly.

"They will," said Mr. Tufnell sweetly.

And the heiress smiled approvingly on her slaves, and then looked defiantly at Captain Luxmoore.

"Did you give this not very overwhelming treat to have the praises of the world and the grateful servility of the poor little wretches themselves, or simply to give them pleasure with no thought of self-seeking?" asked the captain when he had managed to draw Julia for a moment aside, without showing how he had manœuvred.

"You are always ill-natured to me. You are sure to find an evil motive for my actions—even my best," was her reply, made tartly.

"Do you call it ill-nature to hold it well for a sensible woman to understand herself and despise flattery?" he answered. "I have a constitutional horror of humbug and excess. So I should have imagined had you. I should not have thought it would have seemed to you ill-nature to credit you with absolute straightforwardness."

"You did not mean that—that is only your way of putting it," said Julia hastily.

"Pardon me; I am not accustomed to tell falsehoods, nor to hear that I do so," he said.

She glanced up at him with eyes that strove to be defying, but failed. His handsome face, always proud and self-contained, had a little dash of sorrow in it and more than a little earnestness—so earnest as to be almost tender. He looked at her straight in the eyes; and she, gathering her forces, tried to look him down with the full gaze that made Mr. Tufnell lower his lids and blush and Mr. Mattison open his wider and laugh; but she could not. Her eyes drooped under his; her flushed cheek grew pale; she was conscious of a kind of schoolgirl tremor, a kind of childlike self-accusing timidity, entirely alien to the principles and ideas of the new school in which she had graduated; but her embarrassment was cut short by the closing up of her little court again and the exaggerated praises of her flatterers—Mr. Tufnell and the owner of Shoreham the

most extreme. This devotion sent up her self-esteem to its usual dominant place in her moral nature. This worship was her due; these praises were not flatteries, but recognition duly earned and rightly paid; she was, what she ought to be, the honoured queen of her little world, the woman superior in all things to men; and what they offered she had the right to accept. It was with all her old self-assertion that she turned to Captain Luxmoore, haughtily challenging his contribution to the incense floating about her.

"You have been kind," he said simply; and she felt herself change colour when he said it, cold and few as his words were, and that her lips involuntarily smiled.

Then remembering that she was at war with him, she laughed satirically as she cried: "What evil have I done that Captain Luxmoore praises me?" and stiffened her lips out of their late gracious curves into hard and ugly Mephistophelian lines.

Again she caught that grave, tender, yet sorrowful expression in his face as with a slight sigh he turned away, and soon after bade her good night.

The days passed a little heavily after this school-feast of which Julia hated to be reminded, no one knew why. There was the same outward flow of life and amusement as before; there were the hunting days and the dinners, the luncheons and the *soirées*, the drives and the visits, the usual round of toilsome

pleasures by which rich people kill time and call it enjoyment; but the fire of life seemed to have slackened for the young heiress, and though the attentions of the constant two were as profound and untiring as ever, somehow the zest had gone, and she began to feel it no better amusement to make them happy or miserable than shooting barndoor fowls is an amusement to a sportsman. They had gone down before her too readily, and left her none of the excitement of conquest. Mr. Tufnell's invertebrate compliance and Mr. Mattison's muscular self-complacency had wearied her; and she was now a handsome young female Alexander weeping for more worlds to conquer.

She gazed from her windows over to where Ashdown stood among its trees—the one spot as yet impregnable; but by the look of things Captain Luxmoore had no mind to change his plan or to make one of the human worlds subjected to her; and she beat herself against the bars of his self-possession in vain. He was unconquerable by any of the methods known to her, and for the first time in her life she had to own her master.

One day the Hunt met as usual, and as usual its Diana was there, looking supremely lovely and more than ever Amazonian and independent. It was not a favourable morning for the men, if the beast profited; for the scent was cold and the hounds wild. The field was scattered everywhere, and no one seemed to know

much about the matter, from the huntsman to the butcher's boy. Miss Calvert was of course closely squired by the master; and though she manifestly wanted to shake him off, he, with his sweet-tempered obtuseness, saw nothing, and believed he was not only doing his duty and making himself happy, but giving her pleasure as well. He was a fixture; seeing only two things—that she was beautiful, that he had a personal interest in her loveliness and meant to have more.

In the distance, sitting like a statue on his handsome bay, Captain Luxmoore stood sentinel at one corner of the spinny where the hounds were ranging. He was quite alone, the rest of the field spread everywhere but where he was. Julia had often looked across to where he sat so quietly, but he had not seemed aware of her existence. It was provoking to make pretty flourishes with her whip, her handkerchief, to attract the attention of a statue—to try to animate a lump of clay. At last, still accompanied by Mr. Mattison, she rode at a sharp pace and in a sharp temper to where the captain stood in such quiet patience and watching.

"You are not taking it out of yourself or your horse to-day, Luxmoore," said the master a little banteringly as they drew up and confronted him.

"No," answered the captain; "I have my fancies. This is the spot."

"Is it acuteness or indolence?" asked Julia with an unpleasant smile.

She was so sore against him all through, she could never forego the opportunity of a thrust.

"I do not think it is indolence; but it may be," he answered tranquilly.

"It looks like it. You might as well make a try with the rest," said Julia, tossing her head with her disdainful air, but alluring too, and pretty if unamiable.

He smiled, as he might have smiled at an impatient child. "*Tout vient à qui sait attendre*," he answered; and as he spoke the fox broke away almost directly under their feet.

Either Julia's nerve had failed her to-day, or her chestnut, always a little too fiery for a lady, had had an extra feed; for some cause or other, unexplained, she lost her hand, and the chestnut, with a snort and a plunge, was off at a mad gallop, striding down a ploughed field which ended, as they all knew too well, in a low hedge with the hard roadway lying about twenty feet below. There was a general shout and a general commotion. The heiress of the county in such deadly peril! Miss Calvert, young, beautiful, and fabulously wealthy, with the chance of lying a corpse in less time than it takes to tell! Men left the hounds and the fox to their fate and rushed madly after the

runaway horse;—Mr. Mattison the foremost as he was the most excited and the most distressed. The thundering hoofs of the following horses only made the chestnut wilder; and increased the poor girl's peril. She drew nearer and nearer to the fatal hedge, and many checked their horses and turned away their heads, shuddering: they did not want to see her cruel end. A minute more and all would be over; when Captain Luxmoore, who had made a diagonal cut across the field, drove his horse ahead, and at the risk of his own life stopped the chestnut just in time.

Miss Calvert's self-possession was admirable. She was very pale and looked a trifle scared; but though the chestnut had checked himself so suddenly, that it took good horsemanship to hold on; she kept her seat and smiled graciously on the man who had saved her. He, now that the danger was over, looked perhaps the more disturbed of the two.

"Thank you," she said with fervour, and held out her small hand impulsively; her chestnut standing rigid, apparently struck to stone by the reaction of terror.

Captain Luxmoore's face flushed, and his eyes had a strangely bright and searching look for a moment as he leaned forward and touched her hand. But he, too, was good at fencing with his feelings.

"I am glad to have been of use," he said without affectation; adding in a manly way, not flattering so

much as earnest: "We all hold it a privilege, Miss Calvert, to serve you."

"Save, you mean; and all would not have done so much for me," she answered, still with that dangerous softness in her face and with the perilous abandonment of her old disdain.

"Well, save, if you like," he said, wheeling his horse to her side, neck to neck.

Mr. Mattison, and those of the gentlemen of the Hunt who had preferred woman to fox, now surrounded her, and she was beset with questions, advice, congratulations, inquiries, till she scarcely knew how to answer or whom. In spite of her pride and courage too, her nerves were a little shaken, and she longed to be alone or with only one to befriend her—some one quiet, silent, with a still manner, not excited, not interrogative—some one with that nameless sense of superiority belonging to the true man, and on whom she felt she could rest—supreme blessedness of all women, even the most independent!—some one who would be strong enough for them both, stronger even than her own strength.

"My head aches," she said after a few moments to Captain Luxmoore who still kept close to her side. "I am going home."

"And I with you," he answered quietly, as if he had had the right.

She looked pleased.

"Thank you; that will be kind," she said with gentleness, and turned to wish the squire, who was at her other side, good-bye.

"I must see you home. I cannot let you go alone," said that worthy fellow fussily. "Here! hi! where is your groom? You must not be left only to him."

"*I* am going with Miss Calvert," said Captain Luxmoore in a level voice, but decidedly.

And before Mr. Mattison could reply, Julia added a little hurriedly: "Yes, Mr. Mattison, Captain Luxmoore will take care of me; and I would rather you finished your day. You are losing time."

"I would rather go with you," said the squire positively.

"And I would rather you did not," said the heiress just as positively. "Good-bye."

"Miss Calvert!" he remonstrated.

"Come, Captain Luxmoore," said Julia, wilfully not hearing; and the two rode off together—poor Mr. Mattison thrown out in both ways, having lost the fox and the girl at one blow.

"You will come in to luncheon?" asked Julia, as they rode up to Beechover.

He smiled.

"Thanks," he said; "if you will allow me."

"With pleasure," she answered, trying to speak unconcernedly, but failing.

She was not unconcerned in any way, and she could scarcely feign so well as she would have liked; but her companion did not seem to notice anything, and Diana with her impenetrable Endymion entered the house.

This was the first time that Captain Luxmoore had been domesticated at Beechover; and it was a novelty to him to see Miss Calvert quiet, almost tender, natural, with no affectation of man-hating or the like, the mere woman at home. She was delightful; far more so than as the woman of society, as the Amazon in opposition to men whom yet she placed her glory in befooling. She played after luncheon and sang his favourite songs to please him; she showed him her drawings and discussed her favourite authors and his. She seemed to use no arts; to be just the simple, graceful, unaffected woman, liking to please but not seeking to subdue; a little timid and more ready to defer than to assume, having abandoned her follies for the sweeter realities of womanhood, and most serene when least certain. He, with a subtle air of tenderness that made her heart beat as no man's tenderness had made it beat before, was always master over himself—and her. He made her feel that even love could not make him a slave, and that even if she conquered him, she should still be forced to respect him. It was the dignity of manhood to which

she was not too well accoustomed in these later days: but if she was wrong-headed, she was, as we have said, true-hearted—and she liked it.

So the time passed in a sweet and simple friendliness that had both its charm and its danger, when it came suddenly to an end by the breathless arrival of Mr. Tufnell, pale, scared, red-eyed, having just heard of the peril in which "his adorable" had been placed, and which that chattering Rumour with her hundred tongues had magnified into the next thing to total destruction; and close on his heels came Mr. Mattison, feverish and upset, and only to be consoled by a sight of *his* adorable safe and sound in her own house.

And when they came, Captain Luxmoore took his leave, with the look of a man whose airy vision has faded, and who has come back to the dull prosaic life of every day where are wars and rumours of wars, troubles, tears, misunderstandings, and desires impossible of fulfilment.

Mr. Tufnell and Mr. Mattison did not stay long. They both found that her peril had shaken Miss Calvert's nerves most unmistakably; and that her temper, always a little "short," was now dangerous, and necessitated a speedy retreat if terms were to be kept with the future.

PART III.

THE FINISH.

Yes, Miss Calvert's temper was certainly "short." Neither Mr. Tufnell nor Mr. Mattison knew from one day to another from which of the airts the fickle wind of their lady's favour would blow! and both were unhappy in consequence. Or rather Mr. Tufnell was unhappy and the squire was perplexed. The former had a weaker fibre and a less robust self-complacency than the latter; but then as a set-off he had Mrs. Marsh to counsel and console him. From the first she had, as has been said, advocated unqualified submission; but, however good the theory, the apostolic-looking bishop in embryo found that, in fact, the more he abased himself the more he was trampled on; and after a while he began to wonder if his was in truth the right way, and should he not have done better to have taken higher ground from the first?

To be sure, he had the comfort of seeing that Mr. Mattison, who was not humble, fared no better, though he did not seem to know it and took his pains like pleasures; and on the whole it looked as if the young

heiress had said what she really meant when she vaunted her independence, expressed her contempt of men, and vowed she would never marry unless some one offered to whom it was worth her while to sell herself. Also it looked as if it was no empty lamentation when Mrs. Marsh said, as she did so often with a sigh: "Dear Julia, she is the best darling in the world, but she has such an awful temper!"

Still the vicar held on; and his fair friend the companion stood by him so gallantly that more than once he found himself wishing he could exchange natures and persons, and endow Julia Calvert with the mind and disposition of her charming and sympathetic chaperon Hetty Marsh.

No one knew exactly what was the cause of this sudden accession of ill-temper and uncertainty; and perhaps the heiress herself would have been puzzled to explain it. It could have nothing to do with Captain Luxmoore, for he had never called, save once, since her prevented accident; and then she was out. So what it all meant was an enigma to more than one.

In the midst of this dumb discomfort Mr. Mattison gave a ball, as the best propitiation he could devise. It was ostensibly the ball at the breaking up of the hunting season and before they all drifted to London; and naturally it became the great fact of the hour, and much was expected from it. "Diana," of course, was

there, accompanied by her chaperon; and among the crowd were of course her clerical adorer and that enigmatical captain—whom no one knew where to place—whether as a secret lover sighing out his heart in silence; a wary old campaigner biding his time and too wise to be caught before he himself had first secured; or as one indifferent to the great prize of the neighbourhood, and neither biding his time nor losing it.

The ball was a brilliant affair, eclipsing all its predecessors; and the squire's good-natured jubilant face was like a very sun of gladness beaming through his rooms. He had made up his mind to end this shilly-shallying this very week, and force from the coy beauty the confession he had no doubt would come when properly entreated—the confession of her willingness to accept him in exchange for her beloved freedom and boasted independence.

All noticed his face and bearing, and many guessed what was in his mind. Even Mrs. Marsh said to Mr. Tufnell: "He looks as if he had seen an angel." Then she added with a sigh: "You do not think that Julia has been so ill-advised, do you? Yet how else to account for this unusual excitement and very marked happiness?"

"Oh, Mrs. Marsh, do not say that!" gasped the young vicar piteously. "She will be lost for time and

eternity if she flings herself away on such a common nature as this. She is fit for so much better things!"

The chaperon looked up sweetly.

"Yes, she is," she answered; and the vicar accepted what she manifestly intended to bestow.

At this moment Julia, with a very discontented face, came up leaning on the arm of young Mr. Paget; whom she dismissed immediately with a cool bow, professing herself tired.

"Let me wrap this shawl round you, dear," said Mrs. Marsh in a cooing, coaxing voice, holding up a dainty square of Brussels.

Julia, who was decidedly cross, turned away her head and said: "No."

"I am so afraid you will catch cold," pleaded the companion, full of tender solicitude, her sweetness contrasting so vividly with Miss Calvert's abrupt and ungracious manner that Mr. Tufnell himself was startled, and again wished he could change natures and personalities.

"Nonsense, Hetty," said the heiress. "I never catch cold."

"My dear!" remonstrated Hetty, as if the vigorous young huntswoman had been a delicate consumptive creature always fluttering about the edge of the grave. Then turning to Mr. Tufnell she besought him in the prettiest manner possible to use his influence,

and induce Miss Calvert to take care of her precious health.

"Do, Miss Calvert!" said Mr. Tufnell, weakly trying to place the square of lace round her strong firm shoulders.

Julia drew herself up haughtily.

"I do not want it, Mr. Tufnell. You annoy me!" she said, with such decided displeasure of face and accent that the unhappy young vicar felt as if he had been morally unhorsed and overthrown.

Ralph Mattison, coming up just at this moment, got the benefit of the vicar's disgrace; for to punish Mr. Tufnell for his audacity, Julia was so outrageously kind to the squire that he naturally enough looked on the thing as done; and while the case seemed hopeless to the one, success seemed just as certain to the other.

All of which was noted by Captain Luxmoore standing at a little distance, discussing the last accounts from India with Lord Freshfield, who did not know the difference between a durbar and a court; apparently seeing nothing while studying and seizing all; when suddenly, almost as if to protect her, he left his companion and made his way straight to the little group of which Julia, cruelly disdainful to Mr. Tufnell and exaggeratedly amiable to Mr. Mattison, made the discontented centre.

"Shall I take you for an ice, Miss Calvert?" said the captain, as if offering a way of escape.

"Thanks," answered Julia, mean enough to feel grateful; and sweeping up from her place she took Captain Luxmoore's arm and went away, not deigning to cast so much as one comforting look on her disconsolate adorers, nor even to fling a parting word to her chaperon. Yet if pleasure makes the heart good she might have done so; for she was pleased—and for the first time to-night.

As they went, Captain Luxmoore looked down on her hand resting on his arm.

"I see no blood on those white fingers," he said; "yet they are cruel—as cruel as if tipped with steel."

"You are cruel to say so," she answered indignantly. "But then you always are cruel to me—have been from the first."

"On the contrary, I am the only true friend you have here," he said in an intimate, earnest kind of way that touched her more than she would allow to be seen.

"Friend! You a friend! Heaven keep me from more of the same kind!" she cried, making an effort to maintain her petulance of manner.

"Do you say so from your heart?" he asked in a low voice full of tenderness—a voice that made her blush

and tremble as it had done once before. "Is it yourself or your wounded vanity that speaks to me?"

"Myself," said Julia, turning away her head—faltering; though half angry at his plain speaking.

He slightly pressed her hand against his arm; so slightly, that she was scarcely sure whether it was an accident or by intention.

"I know you better than you know yourself," he said gently; "and in the future you will confess it."

"Only if I can be brought to see myself as one mass of faults—a monster without a redeeming quality," she returned.

"Is that portrait your work of art or mine?" he asked with a smile.

"Yours," she answered hardily.

He laughed lightly.

"I repudiate it, Miss Calvert. Some day I will present you with mine—yourself as I see you."

"Pray not!" she cried. "I should find myself such a wretch I should be tempted to disown myself for ever after."

He looked down into her face.

"Perhaps to disown me," he said in his softest, most eloquent tones.

"Why?" she asked, playing with her fan.

"For presumption," he answered.

A look of triumph shot from her eyes. Had she

then closed her hand over him? was he too one of the victims with the rest? was she really irresistible, and was her master, the man who could withstand and subjugate her, yet to be found? It was only one swift rapid look, and then, with drooping eyes and a tender face, she stood as if listening for what he would say next. But Captain Luxmoore had seen that self-revealing glance, and had read her.

"Not yet," he said to himself, as with the most charming well-bred air of explanation he said: "You did not know that I could draw? and you do not intend to cut me for asking you to give me a sitting?"

"I should not cut you, but I should not give it," the heiress answered after a moment's pause, during which she had more difficulty in conquering herself and subduing her turbulent emotions to the placidity of demeanour demanded by society, than she had ever had before.

"No? That would be cruel," he said, moving away to the refreshment-table for an ice.

Julia was very silent during the drive home. The chaperon who knew her moods to a hair and was wise enough to respect them, followed her example and also held her peace, when suddenly, *à propos* of nothing, Julia exclaimed with energy: "I detest Captain Luxmoore!"

"So do I," said Mrs. Hetty Marsh; "I always have."

"Then why should you?" she answered snappishly. "I am sure he has always been very civil to you. *You* have no cause to dislike him; and I hate to see such unjust prejudices."

"Shall I say I like him?" asked Mrs. Marsh with a little laugh.

"Don't be silly," was Julia's superb answer; after which silence fell again between them, and Julia shed a few tears—in the dark.

The next day Mr. Mattison called. He had found no opportunity handy for the final plunge that he had intended to make last night; but elated by the unmistakable encouragement given him by "Diana" when she had wished to snub the vicar, he thought that his standing was entirely secure, and that he had only to ask and receive. He came in radiant, confident, with the look of a man who has conquered fate and fortune and has but to accept what grace lies ready for him.

As soon as he entered, Julia read what was coming. It was the little difficulty she had staved off for so long, yet which she had always known would one day overtake her. If she was vain and headstrong and inconsiderate, fond of power and proud of her facility of conquest, she was not cruel when brought face to face with a catastrophe, and she shrank from giving serious pain. Besides, it is a bore to have for your next-door neighbour in the country a man who has

made you an offer which you have refused—a man whom you are meeting everywhere; at all dinners, at all balls, on every hunt-day and in the suggestive mazes of garden-parties. You have to keep a quiet face to the world, and not to let the busybodies see the truth; but you cannot talk and laugh and flirt with the innocent unconcern of former times, and the cleft stick into which you have put yourself is unpleasantly hard and tight. How bitterly poor Julia regretted her folly in playing with the fire which sooner or later must burn her own fingers! After all, why should she have led that poor fellow on as she had done, only to his own discomfiture? He was a harmless, kind-hearted man; why should he be made unhappy for her vanity and wilfulness?

She was quite penitent and oppressed when she sat down on the sofa; he drawing a chair right in front of her, for his better encouragement during his oration and to see her responsive face more clearly. Knowing, as she did, the ordeal before her, the humiliation of what was substantially a confession of guilt, and—somehow taught softness for others in these later days—sorry for the pain she was about to inflict, she was almost moved and decidedly subdued. And her penitence and discomfort gave her an air of such delicious softness that the squire's hopes were raised into more certainty than ever, so that his confidence was that of

a man who has already won. Had there been, as there was not, the faintest chance for him, he himself would have destroyed it by his over-certainty. It went a little way towards hardening the softening fibres of her heart, making her feel that if she was to blame he would be none the worse for a lesson that would last him perhaps for life.

When he had made his confession and demand, Julia put on the astonished face which comes like second nature to women after they have lured men on to the point of self-committal and a declaration of feelings which it was never intended should be returned.

"You have taken me by surprise," she said, acting her part with considerable skill. "I had no idea you felt for me more than the most ordinary friendship."

"I have loved you from the first moment I saw you," said Ralph, by no means cast down. If certainty of his feelings was all that was wanted, he would soon supply that.

"But I didn't know," Julia answered with a half-ashamed face. "If I had, I would have been more careful of my conduct. I would have shown you—— "

"That you sanctioned and returned my love!" Mr. Mattison interrupted, taking her hand and looking into her face with rather dangerous ardour.

"No," said Julia coldly, withdrawing her hand; "I

would have shown you that I never could sanction, never could return it."

There was something in her manner as she said this which was not coquetry, which was still less indecision. It staggered Ralph, dense as were his perceptions, strong as was his self-complacency.

"I cannot believe you," he faltered, his handsome joyous face blanched and pitiful.

"You must," she said firmly, looking down.

"But you love me!" he exclaimed. "I am sure you do! You have as good as told me."

"Good gracious, Mr. Mattison, I am sure I never have!" cried Julia, startled into vehemence and inelegance. "What are you talking about!"

"My life and all that makes life worth having," he answered, with so much simple pathos that for a moment Julia felt her own eyes grow moist.

"I am so sorry!" she said, without pretence or affectation. "But I can do nothing."

"Yes, yes," he cried; "you can make me, from one of the most miserable, one of the happiest of men!"

She shook her head.

"The price is too heavy," she said in a low voice. "I do not love you, and I cannot marry you."

An hour after this, Captain Luxmoore met the owner of Shoreham—a transformed man. His bright beaming smile had passed like yesterday's sunshine in to-day's

storm; his florid face was drawn and pale; his blue eyes were sad, wandering and no longer bold and frank; he looked shrunken and shorter, as if he had lost something of his personality and much of his strength and vitality; altogether a different man from what he was last night when, joyous and radiant, he thought to have touched the gates of heaven and to have accomplished his prescribed time of waiting. Nothing was said between the two men; but when they parted Captain Luxmoore drew a deep breath as he said involuntarily half aloud: "The course clearer by one."

Soon after this it was announced that Mr. Mattison had shut up Shoreham and gone for a year's travel through America; and if some were sorry, Julia Calvert was relieved, and the vicar on his side was rejoiced and blessed the roving blood born in Saxon veins. The squire's absence encouraged him. He had never liked this perpetual buzzing about Miss Calvert, as he used to call it disdainfully; buzzers themselves being always intolerant of their kind. He had held Mr. Mattison as an inferior creature by the side of a man of thought and spirituality—such as himself; nevertheless he had been afraid of him, representative as he was of the fleshpots and the finery of life. He breathed more fully now that he had gone; and the skirts of his surplice seemed to brush the gates of the same heaven

as that before which the poor deluded squire had stood in expectation.

He had always been given to lengthy discourse on the influence possessed by the dignitaries of the Church; and with all his meekness of manner, the spirit of a very A'Beckett seemed to possess him when he exalted the functions and position of the lords spiritual. But where he had discoursed for one hour before, he perorated for two now; and the higher he exalted the function the lower he placed the man—in relation to Miss Calvert. He reasoned it out clearly and fitly that a bishop's wife is the bishop's conscience-keeper and the mistress of the diocese. It was a position that might be coveted for its own sake by a princess, he said, with longing looks raised in respectful self-abasement to the heiress; but Julia, whom Mr. Mattison's complacent certainty had disgusted, was even more revolted by Mr. Tufnell's servility and cut his maunderings short, turning him over to Mrs. Marsh who found him and his reasonings what Pepys would have called "pretty," though less than profitable for her own purposes. For quite suddenly, after a brief and rather tearful interview with Miss Calvert, the vicar obtained a six months' leave of absence from his diocesan, who was also his father; and when next heard of, he had been given a stall and been married out of hand to a wealthy widow, a few years

his senior, who would take care of him. And when Hetty Marsh heard of this, she said he was a wretch, and a mean-spirited animal whom she had always detested.

So now the fair owner of Beechover had lost her two principal aspirants and was left practically loverless—the only one of the triangular duellists remaining being the one who had made no effort to win her, who had not flattered her, had not wooed nor sought, but who had stood aside and proclaimed his faith in waiting, had told her in plain language of her faults, had ridiculed her pretensions to independence, had always asserted the supremacy of his manhood, and had refused to be cajoled or subdued.

Yet this was the only man who had ever cost her a tear, or whose favour she had yearned to gain.

This then was the condition to which she was reduced—she, the believer in woman's rights as the new order of regenerated society—she, the despiser of men as wretched creatures only good to be the superior being's humble slaves and to take the law from her lips—she, the proud and self-sufficing Julia Calvert, now weeping hot tears in the dark for the sake of a man whom she could not conquer, but who had conquered her—without trying.

What would Captain Luxmoore do now that the field was clear and the two favourites come to grief?

The country held its breath as it looked on in anxious expectation; but the captain gave no sign of beginning a new act in this little drama of the *Love Chase* playing at Wensley. To be sure he went rather oftener than before to Beechover, and his ways and looks were decidedly softer, more melancholy, more enigmatic; but he was always the same substantially—grave, self-possessed, reticent; and the siren who had subdued the others was still baffled by him.

"You must miss your old playfellows," he said one day to Julia, as he sat by her on the lawn after having discussed the monotonous aspect of life as Wensley just now knew it—no balls, no dinners, nothing going on, all the families away and the heiress and himself lingering in the country when they ought to have gone up to town at the beginning of the season.

"Do you mean Lady Freshfield? She was never an intimate of mine," answered Julia, wilfully misunderstanding.

"No; I mean the apostolic-looking vicar and Mr. Mattison," he answered.

"I do not see why you should call either of those gentlemen by such an absurd name as that of my playfellow," said Julia, colouring with a curious feeling of shame and annoyance combined.

"No?" The captain's voice expressed surprise. "What else shall we call them—your victims?"

"Captain Luxmoore!" she cried indignantly.

"Miss Calvert!"

"You have no right to say such things to me!" she said, deeply disturbed.

"In what do I offend?" he asked innocently. Then changing his tone to one of earnestness, he added: "You know the end of your cruel amusement with these two poor fellows, Miss Calvert, and I know it too. Was it good? was it noble? I cannot say was it womanly?—for unfortunately it was only too much so! Two men, worthy and faithful enough each in his own way, made fools of, for what?—the gratification of that terrible vanity which seems like a very curse on some women—women who make men love them only to ridicule them for their passion and punish them for their belief! I ask you again—is this a worthy pastime, a noble life?"

"I did not ridicule them!" said Julia, part petulant, part angry.

"Not even Mr. Tufnell, with his meek ways and shadowy mitre? Let then the question of confessed contempt pass, you cannot deny that you made fools of them both, and allowed them to hope and strive for that which you never intended to bestow."

"It is not my fault if people want to marry me. Beechover is a pretty place," said Julia, suddenly flashing out into her old disdain; "and men are mercenary," she added.

Captain Luxmoore looked at her as if he would have driven his eyes right into her heart.

"That is an answer which far from excuses you, Miss Calvert," he said gravely. "Mattison, at all events, loved you for yourself, not your money. And even had it not been so, you had no right to act as you did. Is it fair on human nature to trade on its confessed weakness, and to think yourself justified because you find it as weak as you know it to be?"

"You are severe, Captain Luxmoore," was all that Julia could say. Had she said more, she would have ended in tears.

"Respect—affection which sees the faults in the one"—the captain hesitated, then said "admired," as if he had checked himself—"that is not severity; it is the truest homage. If I did not think you a noble creature in heart, Miss Calvert, and that all these faults were only superficial and the faults of youth and want of guidance, I would not care to speak. But just in proportion to my—esteem—is my sorrow to see you fail and my desire to see you perfect. Now forgive me," holding out his hand; "I will never offend you again; but I felt that I must tell you how men regard the kind of thing you have done. Do you forgive me?"

Julia did not speak, but she laid her hand in his, and he pressed it tenderly.

There was silence after this for some moments; and then Captain Luxmoore, rising, said in a moved voice: "I am glad you have forgiven me; for I should have been grieved to have carried away your displeasure, and I must bid you good-bye now for some time."

"What! Are you going away?" she cried abruptly, as if startled.

"Yes," he answered; "very soon."

"Are you going far?"

"Rather—to Africa," he answered.

She grew as pale as if she were about to faint and her dumb lips moved inaudibly.

"I am sorry," she then said after a long pause, during which she had struggled with her emotion and conquered it so far as to be able to articulate. "You are running into danger unnecessarily."

"A man must do something," he said. "I am losing my time here—wasting my life in fruitless regrets."

"Are you so unhappy?" asked Julia in a low voice.

"Ah," he sighed, "the heart knows its own bitterness—and I know mine!"

"But why go so far because you are unhappy at Wensley?" she said timidly. "You will be killed—those horrid lions and savages!"

"One can die only once; and if I am killed, who cares?"

She looked up into his face with moist dilated eyes.

"Some will," she faltered.

"Some! I do not want some to care. I want only the one!" was his reply.

"That depends on who that one is," she said, trembling.

"You, for instance, would not care," said Captain Luxmoore in a voice which he vainly tried to make indifferent and steady.

"Should I not?" she answered.

"Would you?"

He sat down by her again and looked into her face.

"A little," she said, turning away her head.

"Only a little! about so much regret as you would give to your dead dog!" bitterly, despairingly.

"A little more than that," half whispered Julia.

"As much as I for you?" said the captain, again taking her hands in his, she leaving them passive in his hold.

"Perhaps more," said Julia; her head drooped still lower.

"Is this said sincerely? You are not playing with me? Darling, tell me; do you really love me?"

As he spoke he drew her gently towards him.

"I am afraid I do!" said Julia, turning to him half coyly, half generously, and hiding her face on his shoulder.

"Ah, this is happiness at last!" he cried, passing

his hand over her hair. "The happiness I have been afraid to hope but have longed for from the beginning!"

She gave a little movement of surprise.

"Yes," he said; "from the beginning. But I had to keep my secret, else I should not have won the prize. If I had made myself your slave, you would never have been where you are now—in my arms. Confess, darling, is not this better than all your old false theories? Is not Love sweeter than Liberty? a man's care better than a woman's independence?"

She lifted up her face, blushing, tender, smiling; but she did not speak.

"I can read my answer, dear!" he said fondly, taking her head between both his hands, and kissing her bashful lips.

END OF VOL. I.

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